

**WITH OR WITHOUT CONSENT: THE STATE AND
CONTROL OF LABOUR MILITANCY IN FIJI 1942-1985**

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I hereby declare that this thesis is an original piece of work, based on my own research, and that all sources have been acknowledged.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AG	Attorney General
A&GWU	Airport and General Workers Union
AH&CWU	Airport, Hotel and Catering Workers
AWU	Airline Workers Union
COLA	Cost of Living Adjustment
Col Sec	Colonial Secretary
CSO	Colonial Secretary's Office
CSR	Colonial Sugar Refinery
DC	District Commissioner
EGM	Emperor Gold Mines
FCTU	Fiji Council of Trade Unions
FECA	Fiji Employers Consultative Group
FEDM	Fiji Employment and Development Mission
FFL	Fiji Federation of Labour
FIWC	Fiji Industrial Workers Congress
FMU	Fiji Mineworkers Union
FNP	Fijian Nationalist Party
FO&AWU	Fiji Oil and Allied Workers Union
FPSA	Fiji Public Service Association
FS	Fiji Sun
FS & GWU	Fiji Sugar and General Workers Union
FSC	Fiji Sugar Corporation

FSIEA	Fiji Sugar Industry Employees Association
FSSWU	Fiji Sugar Skilled Workers Union
FT	Fiji Times
FTA	Fijian Teachers Association
FTUC	Fiji Trades Union Congress
FWW&SU	Fiji Waterside Workers and Seamens Union
GLU	General Labourers Association
ICFTU/APRO	International Confederation of Free Trades Union/Asia Pacific Regional Office
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ITF	International Transport Federation
ILO	International Labour Organisation
JIC	Joint Industrial Council
LCP	Legislative Council Paper
MP	Minute Papers (in Colonial Secretary's Office)
NES	National Economic Summit
NFP	National Federation Party
NZFOL	New Zealand Federation of Labour
PAF	Ports Authority of Fiji
PEU	Public Employers Union
PP	Parliamentary Paper
PR	Pacific Review
PW&AWU	Public Works and Allied Workers Union
PWD	Public Works Department

PWEU	Public Works Employees Union
SNTUC	Singapore National Trade Union Congress
WRWGU	Wholesale and Retail Workers General Union
WTU	Workers Trade Union
WUF	Western United Front

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS: THEORY, METHOD AND ARGUMENT

This thesis examines relations between organised labour and the colonial and post-colonial state in Fiji in the period 1942 - 1985. It highlights some of the dynamics of labour/state relations, focussing particularly on strategies of containment and co-option employed by both the colonial and post-colonial state to control organised labour, and especially labour militancy. The thesis argues that, in the period under study, both the colonial and post-colonial state, in its relationship with organised labour, had an agenda of controlling trade unions and containing labour militancy. This was pursued both through outright coercion and through more covert strategies of control, and often with the complicity of moderate labour leaders.

The theories which inform and guide the thesis relate generally to the state in capitalist society and its variants, the colonial and post-colonial state. The theories of the state which are drawn upon are principally Marxist rather than democratic pluralist and I mainly draw on ideas which address the state in relation to labour. The approach is eclectic, the function of theory being to provide a framework for analysis.

The State and the Capital/Labour Relation

Theorisations on the state under capitalism by Marxist scholars challenge the democratic pluralist notion of the state as an autonomous entity, mediating between the competing interests of a plurality of organised and represented groups. Instead, the state is recognised as crucially supportive of capital. Indeed, Marxists argue that capital is unable

to secure its own reproduction without the assistance of the state. The capital/labour relation, they argue, is characterised by struggle - class struggle - and it is in capital's interests to maintain dominance of the process of class struggle by controlling and subordinating labour. This capital cannot do without the assistance of the state.

The role of the state is in fact crucial. In Marxist political theory, the state in capitalist society abstracts from the economic to the political level the functions of guaranteeing the necessary conditions for capital and of maintaining dominance in class relations (Berman & Lonsdale 1979:489). Indeed, to the extent that the state organises structures indispensable for the functioning of capitalist society, it can be called a **capitalist state** (Jessop 1977). "Above all the coercive instrument of a ruling class" (Miliband 1973:7), the state's over-riding role is, according to Marxist theorists, to reproduce the capitalist social formation or to prevent its disintegration. For, not only is capital unable to secure for itself its own reproduction but it would, paradoxically, destroy the social formation if left to its own devices. As Stewart (n.d.:8) explains:

Those who accumulate capital can identify and pursue their interests as capitalists, but in general they are not able to identify and maintain the necessary conditions needed to reproduce the social order in its entirety in the face of changing circumstances.

How does the state perform its role for capital? Until Gramsci (1971) developed a coercion/consent analysis of the state and expounded his theory of hegemony, the classic Marxist theory of the state was essentially concerned with showing its repressive role (Poulantzas 1973). Post-Gramsci theories of the state affirm the equal importance of the state's ideological and repressive roles. The system of the state, as Poulantzas saw it,

comprises several apparatuses, some of which have a principally repressive role (the government, army, police, tribunals, administration), while others have a principally ideological role (the church, political parties, non-revolutionary trade unions, the schools, mass media and the family). It is through the interconnected functions of the repressive and ideological apparatuses, the latter of which are concerned with the ideological inculcation and transmission necessary for engendering consent, that bourgeois hegemony and the capitalist social formation are preserved or reproduced.

Marxists note that, in performing its ideological role, the state may be compelled, paradoxically, to make concessions to dominated classes - even concessions which might appear to run counter to the short-term interests of capital. This paradox however, arises as much from the state's own need for legitimation, as it cannot afford to be seen as the handmaiden of capital. The seemingly contradictory roles that arise from performing a balancing act between ensuring conditions for capital on the one hand, and ensuring legitimation for itself on the other, partly explain the persistence of the notion of the state's 'autonomy' or 'relative autonomy'(Poulantzas 1973).

Corporatist Theories of the State

The concept of 'corporatism' has been developed to explain a political structure employed by the state in advanced capitalist societies to help it perform its role for capitalism. Corporatism was defined by Schmitter (1979;13) as:

a system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organised into a limited number of singular, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically-ordered and functionally-differentiated categories, recognised or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate, representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for

observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports.

Corporatist theorists argue that the modern state, as it expanded its regulative and integrative tasks in performance of its role as the "indispensable and authoritative guarantor of capitalism" needed:

the professional expertise, specialised information, prior aggregation of opinion, contractual capability and deferred participatory legitimacy which only singular, hierarchically-ordered, consensually-led representative monopolies can provide (Schmitter 1979;27).

The "singular, hierarchically-ordered, consensually-led representative monopolies" referred to are peak organisations of employers (organised capital) and of trade unions (organised labour). Although corporatist theorists linked corporatism to the state's function as the guarantor of capitalism, they did not expose it as a mechanism through which the state, by legitimating a particular form of political representation, and by formalising consent at the political level, is able to control the major obstacle to capitalist accumulation - organised labour. Instead, corporatist political and economic systems were proffered as an alternative political model which might replace pluralist democracy.

It was left to critics of corporatist theory to elucidate the process of domination that corporatism institutionalises and the interests in which corporatist arrangements are made. Accordingly, corporatism was redefined as "a strategy by the dominant class to subordinate labour by means of income policies, social contracts and the like" (Panitch 1979). As such, it was seen as primarily concerned with state-induced class collaboration (Offe 1981). This critical view of corporatism focuses on the subordination of labour and sees the wider significance of trade union incorporation for labour as a whole. Trade

unions are seen as playing a critical role for the working class, as agencies of struggle, of representation, and, if included in corporatist arrangements, of social control (Offe 1981). As such corporatism is "disabling and detrimental to the interests of labour as a whole, while functional for the interests of capital as a whole" (Stewart 1984).

Labour's voluntary participation in corporatist arrangements in advanced capitalist states, however, suggested that corporatism entailed a trade-off for organised labour:

Corporatist structures, in the form of economic planning and incomes policy bodies, involved the integration of trade unions in economic policy-making in exchange for their incorporation of capitalist growth criteria in union wage policy and their administration of wage restraint to their members . (Panitch 1980:174).

Involvement in economic policy-making entails gains for organised labour such as improved welfare, social security, unemployment, education and health benefits. Such gains notwithstanding, corporatist arrangements in advanced capitalist democracies do not empower organised labour vis-a-vis capital (Panitch 1980:175). Indeed, as Panitch sees it, the

marked imbalance between union representational ineffectiveness in terms of policy output on the one hand and their effective legitimization of state policy not only in general terms, but in the concrete material form of wage restraint, on the other ... constitutes the contradiction of corporatist structures in liberal democracies (1980;175).

Because of this contradiction, which leads unions to periodically disengage from active co-operation, corporatist structures are inherently unstable and often require reinforcement through state coercion (Panitch 1980:175). As Panitch explains it, state

coercion functions not to break the unions as organisation but to "require...union discipline over the rank and file" who may show greater militancy, engage in unofficial strikes or elect new union leaders. In such a context corporatism functions to reinforce the moderate union leaders who embrace such arrangements.

In Third World states, corporatism is most often forcibly imposed by authoritarian regimes (Malloy et. al. 1977). Deyo (1971), in a study of 'voluntary' corporatism in Singapore, offers the theory that voluntary corporatism in Third World states stems from a general tendency towards "political unionism". This is a tendency to "pursue collective goals through political rather than economic means" and to be "closely associated with national political parties and elites". Deyo suggests that political unionism predisposes the labour movement in these societies towards participating in corporatist arrangements. Political unionism derives in part from the

typically weak bargaining position of unions in the context of labour surpluses and economic stagnation (which encourages unions to) turn to government for protection against employers and more generally to pursue bargaining goals through government intervention (Deyo 1971).

Political unionism is offered as a general explanation for voluntary participation in corporatist arrangements in the Third World. Deyo's theory suggests that corporatist arrangements strengthen and advantage organised labour vis-a-vis capital in the Third World and engage the state in a protective role towards labour and trade unions. He ignores both that the new role assigned to unions under Singapore's corporatist system was enforced with "deregistrations, detentions and permanent threat of destruction" and that the beneficiaries of labour's incorporation have unequivocally been foreign investors

(Luther 1978:219).

Generally, corporatist theorists and their critics share a reductionist perspective on why the state institutes corporatist arrangements -. because it is functional for the accumulation of capital. The accumulation process is, moreover, assumed to take place outside of the sphere of the state. Only Deyo offers a theory of corporatism that counters this functional-for-capital view and suggests benevolent paternalism on the part of the post-colonial state.

The reductionist perspective ignores the possibility that the post-colonial state, or those who control it, might also be serving its/their own political and economic interests by instituting a corporatist arrangement, particularly in contexts in which the state is itself involved in the accumulation process and where economic surpluses are used in part to support a governing class.

The Colonial and Post-Colonial State

The earliest theorisations of the colonial and post-colonial state appeared within the debate which began in the 1970's with the publication of Hamza Alavi's 1974 article in the New Left Review. This debate focussed on notions of the overdeveloped post-colonial state and its 'relative autonomy'. Alavi saw the colonial state as unequivocally serving the interests of the metropolitan bourgeoisie while the post-colonial state derived relative autonomy from the existence of competing fractions of the ruling class between which it mediated. Alavi's main concern was with the predominant position of the bureaucracy and the military in post-colonial states. Writing on Pakistan and Bangladesh, he explained the

overdeveloped post-colonial state as arising from the prior existence of an overdeveloped colonial state before it, comprising a powerful bureaucratic-military apparatus whose function was to subordinate the native social classes (Alavi 1974). Saul (1974), writing on Tanzania, in addition saw the overdeveloped superstructure of the colonial state arising from a need to subordinate pre-capitalist, non-feudal social formations to the imperatives of colonial capitalism.

Although the discussion of the colonial state in this debate is peripheral and subsumed within the discussion on the post-colonial state, there is a shared view that the colonial state functioned especially to aid the process of capitalist accumulation in the periphery. This view is shared by other scholars. As Von Freyhold (1977:75) put it:

the main economic task of the colonial state...(was) to make inroads into pre-colonial economies, opening them up for private accumulation by metropolitan capital.

Equally shared by theorists of the colonial state is the perception of the colonial state as essentially coercive. Writing much later, Chandra (1980:281), described the colonial state not as a "superstructure erected on the base of the colonial economy" but rather as an "integral and intrusive element in the structure and functioning of the colonial economy". As such, he said, it relied more heavily than does the (advanced) capitalist state on domination through its political, coercive apparatuses. The interventions it had to make to ensure the establishment of capitalist social relations necessitated a reliance on provisions for the use of force. Berman & Lonsdale (1980) noted the role of the colonial state in Kenya in ensuring, through coercion, both an adequate labour supply and that African labourers stayed at work. They also noted the colonial state's active assistance to

merchant capital accumulation and its critical role in appropriating African land. Such interventions, necessary for the creation of capitalist social relations, posed problems for the colonial state's legitimacy particularly as they necessitated provisions for the use of force to deal with the consequences of the expansion of capitalism.

Neo-Marxist dependency theorists like Frank (1972) see the post-colonial state as essentially continuing to serve the interests of the metropolitan bourgeoisie or of international capital. The post-colonial state is seen as the essential and active link between the national and international economy: it mediates between national capital and labour and international capital and it does this to the benefit of international capital, at relative cost to national capital and at the absolute expense of local labour. Neo-Marxists see the role and function of the post-colonial state as differing little from that of the colonial state, although it is acknowledged that the post-colonial state performs other functions that its predecessor did not - such as, for instance, directly appropriating a large part of the economic surplus which it uses in bureaucratically-directed economic activity. This, it is recognised, creates a new and relatively autonomous role for the post-colonial state. It has also given rise, it was argued, to a new social class, the "bureaucratic bourgeoisie".

Theorists of the post-colonial state do indeed suggest that the post-colonial state is the instrument of this "bureaucratic bourgeoisie" (Alavi 1974; Saul 1974; Shivji 1976). This class, comprising senior civil servants and politicians, inherited state power at independence and derives considerable economic power from the state's management of resources and appropriation of nationally-generated wealth. It is a class which, as Saul

shows in the case of Kenya, often directly benefits from certain state policies such as special financial arrangements, training programmes and from manipulating licences (Saul 1974). It entrenches its power by extending the state's control over the national economy. As such, it may be said to be a class with objective interests of its own. These interests are usually intertwined with those of both local and metropolitan capital and are "antagonistic to the interests of the mass of the population" (Saul 1974:355).

The notion of the "bureaucratic bourgeoisie" contributes to a class-based explanation of the tendency towards authoritarian forms of the state in post-colonial societies to the extent that it is this class, in its use of the state as a vehicle for private accumulation, which is most threatened by criticism and demands for reform.

The Theoretical Framework, Structure and Argument of the thesis

The foregoing theoretical ideas then are those which have informed this study and which have provided a framework for analysis. I take a generally Marxist perspective of the state. The state (colonial and post-colonial) is seen as generally performing a critical function in capitalist social relations, especially with respect to containing class conflict by controlling and subordinating labour. The thesis is mainly concerned with highlighting this function and showing the continuities in practice between the colonial and post-colonial state in Fiji. It seeks to highlight the coercive and cooptive strategies used, to show how the foundations for corporatist control of organised labour by the post-colonial state were laid by the post-war colonial state, and to explore the extent to which the post-colonial state, or those who control it, may have had objective interests of their own in instituting a corporatist arrangement.

The notion of the "relative autonomy" of the post-colonial state appears to have relevance in the Fiji case. Indeed, this study will suggest that those who control the post-colonial state have objective interests of their own, and that these assume greater importance in times of political crisis. Although the interests of the class of state-power holders, at the economic level, are generally intertwined with those of capital and primarily concerned with domination and control of the labouring class, at the political level, these interests are also concerned with maintaining the legitimacy and power of a ruling elite or governing class. Furthermore, it is these latter interests, I will argue, which, in the case of Fiji, lay behind the post-colonial state's institution of corporatism as a cooptive strategy vis-a-vis organised labour. The interests behind - and the contradiction inherent in - voluntary corporatism, as well as the instability or unreliability of the corporatist arrangement as a mechanism for the long-term containment and control of organised labour are explored in the last section of the thesis.

This thesis takes as its starting point a recognition of class divisions in Fiji and rejects as inadequate and misleading approaches based on the pre-eminence of race both in shaping developments in Fiji and in determining social, political and economic interests. In doing so, it departs from traditional approaches to studying Fiji which have tended to dwell on the significance of race in interpretations of historical development and political, social and economic change.¹ The "collective legacy" of what Sutherland (1984) calls "bourgeois historiography and social science" with respect to Fiji has, according to Sutherland "...served to reinforce the dominant ideology of race, an ideology which holds that the problems confronting Fiji both now and in the past, have to do largely with racial tensions" (Sutherland, 1984:2). Departing from this tradition, Sutherland and other more

recent scholars ² provide alternative interpretations of Fiji history. Sutherland's study of the state and capitalist development in Fiji argues that the root causes of Fiji's problems are "underlying class contradictions" which are masked by racial conflict. In other words, in Fiji, class conflicts have assumed a racial form (Sutherland 1984:2).

The Significance of Race

It cannot be denied that race has been a significant factor in Fiji. It is considered, however, that its significance lies in its deployment as a means of obscuring class conflicts and thereby maintaining existing relations of domination. A preoccupation with race has, for instance, obscured the century-long conflict between workers and employers, labour and capital. Throughout the period of British colonial rule in Fiji, manifestations of this conflict were projected in racial terms: strikes were by 'Indian canefarmers' or 'Indian public works employees' or by 'Fijian mineworkers', as if the roots of discontent, the causes of industrial action, lay not in wages and conditions of work but rather in ethnicity.

The fact that certain occupations or industries in Fiji had evolved distinctively segregated patterns of racial hiring and wages were structured differentially for different racial categories, contributed to the tendency to project capital/labour conflicts as conflicts of a particular racial category with employers. But there was also at work the construction of racial ideologies which projected Indians as avaricious, troublesome and politically-motivated and Fijians as backward, indolent, easily-led and unaccustomed to the discipline of wage employment. It will be argued that labour's challenges to capital were most often explained by means of these racial ideologies to obscure and deny the

existence of class conflict. Other racially divisive strategies were also frequently employed by the state to counter militancy in the labour movement.

These and other, covert strategies used by the state to control organised labour and contain labour militancy in Fiji form the subject of this thesis. While overt forms of containment (especially through constraining legislation) have been substantively documented (Hince 1971,1981; Howard 1987; Lal 1983; Bain 1988), the more covert strategies of containment have not. The thesis highlights the complicity of labour leaders in the state's domination and control of the Fiji trade union movement and exposes the interests that directed their cooption. It argues that the post-colonial state's crowning achievement in cooption - the Tripartite Forum - instituted in 1977 with the voluntary participation of a section of the labour movement, was directed by short-term political interests on the part of both the state and a section of labour, and its success in containing labour militancy was short-lived.

The sources from which empirical evidence has been drawn to support the argument of this thesis include the small number of substantive works that have been written on the trade union movement in Fiji, a number of published and unpublished articles, Government reports and other official documents, and, for the period up until 1955 (the period of access at the time of research), files of the Labour Department and other colonial government files relating to labour held in the National Archives in Suva. Selected files held in the Fiji Trades Union Congress archives in Suva were also searched. Corroborative evidence was sought from both personal interviews with individuals who were involved in events and from newspaper reports.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis begins by highlighting the essential role of the colonial state in Fiji in creating and maintaining conditions for early capitalist development, particularly by ensuring a cheap and bonded labour force. As both the maker of law and policy and as the maintainer of law and order, the colonial state was the institution upon which capital critically depended. Through the instrument of law and, in instances of unrest or confrontation, through the show or actual use of force, labour was overtly and coercively controlled. Chapter 2 covers the entire early period of Fiji's colonial history from European contact up until 1942. The assurance of a cheap labour supply and the necessity for controls on labour emerge as continuing themes in both the colonial records and in public debate, as evidenced in the press.

By the 1930's however, overt coercion could no longer be sustained in the context of civil libertarian Britain or under the ever-watchful eyes of the International Labour Organisation. Moreover, the spontaneous organisation of labour in the colonies began to be feared as a likely prelude to a wider political movement. And the demand for labour in the war years significantly altered the nature of employment and the perceptions of labourers in the colony. As a consequence of all these factors the colonial state altered its practice - outright coercion was replaced by a formal policy of encouraging responsible, moderate trade unions and promoting collective bargaining between workers and employers.

The contradictions between the colonial state's policy and practice with regard to organised labour in Fiji in the period 1942-1969 is covered by Chapters 3 and 4. While

projecting itself as an impartial arbiter in the relations between capital and labour, the colonial state actually set in place and employed a number of mechanisms - legislative, institutional and ideological - to facilitate the containment of organised labour. Chapter 3 looks critically at the early stages of implementation of the new labour policy in the period 1942 - 1956. Chapter 4 examines the means employed to deal with the problem of labour militancy which emerged in the late 1950's, challenging the state as much as it did capital, and covers state/labour relations up until 1969, the year before independence.

The response of the state to the resurgence of militancy after independence is covered in Chapters 5 and 6. The post-colonial state, like its colonial predecessor, set in place and employed a number of mechanisms - legislative, ideological and institutional - to contain organised labour. Chapter 5 shows that in the early period from 1970 - 1976, it was primarily blue-collar, private sector unions controlling foreign industries which showed militancy and needed to be contained. In this period the post-colonial state set in place legislative and institutional mechanisms for doing so. The formation in the latter part of the 1970's of the Tripartite Forum - as a corporatist arrangement concerned with national wage-setting, dispute settlement and labour policy formulation - was a major accomplishment for the post-colonial state. In this period, with the consent of organised labour, wage restraint was achieved and trade union moderacy legitimated. Chapter 7 summarises the thesis and draws some broad conclusions about labour/state relations in Fiji.

Endnotes

1. See, for instance, Ali, A. (1980) **Plantation to Politics: Studies on Fiji Indians**, University of the South Pacific and The Fiji Times, Suva; Ali, A. & Mamak, A. 1979 **Race, Class and Rebellion in the South Pacific**, George, Allen & Unwin, Sydney; MacNaught, T. 1982 **The Fijian Colonial Experience: A Study of the Neo-traditional Order Under British Colonial Rule Prior to World War Two**, ANU Pacific Monograph, No 7, Canberra; Norton, R. 1977 **Race and Politics in Fiji**, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland.
2. Two of the earliest alternative histories were Narayan, J. 1976 **Fiji: A Case Study in Political Economy**, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta; and Samy, J. 1977 **Some aspects of Ethnic Politics and Class in Fiji**, Unpublished MPhil. dissertation, University of Sussex. Other recent studies using class analysis include: Bain, 'A. (1987) Vatukoula - Rock of Gold: Labour in the Goldmining Industry of Fiji, 1930 - 1970. PhD. Thesis; Australian National University and Naidu, V. (1988) State Class and Politics in the South Pacific with case studies of Fiji and Western Samoa, PhD. Thesis, University of Sussex.

CHAPTER TWO

THE COERCIVE LABOUR POLICIES OF THE EARLY COLONIAL STATE

'The labour movement has its roots not in politics but in work. It grows out of the nature of that work, the economic and social position of the worker and his response to that position. To view it solely from the top is to miss the dynamic which powers the movement...organisation and group consciousness among workers is created by the workers themselves...' (Iliffe 1975:40).

Introduction

This first chapter briefly surveys labour-state relations prior to the period covered by the thesis. It focuses particularly on the labour policies of the early colonial state and its responses to collective labour action and efforts to organise. This provides a background to the examination of the colonial state's policy and practice in Fiji from 1942 to 1969 that follows and which focuses on the establishment, within the context of an outwardly liberal policy towards organised labour, of new, state-devised mechanisms of control, and the use of the strategy of cooption.

Labour history should hold a central place in Fijian historiography. Europeans came to Fiji in the first instance for sandalwood and beche-de-mer. Both these trades, and particularly the latter, engaged indigenous Fijians for the first time in wage labour and entailed the introduction of firearms, which were readily traded for both access to resources and supply of labour and provisions (Narayan 1984:16). The real rush to Fiji began in the early 1860's, after these resources had been exhausted, and it was primarily in search of land and labour that European settler farmers came. The acquisition of land in the early years proved largely unproblematic. The goods for which land was exchanged

(mainly firearms) were, in the context of existing tribal tensions and contradictions in the Fijian polity, in high demand. By 1876, when the first substantive Governor to Fiji, Sir Arthur Gordon, put an end to any further alienation of Fijian land by Europeans, a total of 854, 956 acres or 19% of the total area of Fiji had been claimed by foreigners (Narayan 1984:23).¹

But land alone could not bring prosperity to the 'planters'. They were planters in name only. Their function in the plantation economies of the New World originally based on slave labour was that of overlords in a system which depended for its success on unfree or bonded labour. The Fiji Times, from its earliest beginnings a voice of planter interests, put it plainly in one of its first editorials:

Paramount in importance and before which all other questions - whether of native wars, Fijian politics or ruling authorities - fade into insignificance is the material one of labour. All the varied and multiform advantages of tropical soil, climate and vast productions are useless without the motive power of human life. (FT 4.6.1870)

That it was specifically non-white, bonded labour that was sought and seen as necessary, was made equally clear by the paper:

Not labour from a European point of view, where it is a mere question of quality and price. We might employ in Fiji tomorrow all the vast excesses of population contained in the overgrown cities of the old world and they would not produce a bale of cotton. Cotton and sugar - their method of production present some curious pages in the world's history and seem fated not to prosper without the aid of slave labour. (FT 4.6.1870)

At the time this editorial appeared, a labour trade had been operating since 1864, amid much controversy, to supply plantations in Queensland and Fiji with cheap and

bondei labour. In Fiji, between 1864 and 1911, more than 20,000 so-called Polynesian (in fact Melanesian) labourers from the Solomon Islands and New Hebrides were estimated to have served terms of indenture under 'contracts' of three years. The product of the kind of thinking exemplified in the Fiji Times editorial was indeed a "new kind of slavery". Underlying the popularity of island indentured labour were two related beliefs. These were, firstly, that islanders worked better when away from their own island and dependent on their employer for food and, secondly, that "men from different islands would never combine" (Morrell 1960:171).

The operation of the Pacific Island labour trade did not mean that indigenous Fijians had not also been coercively recruited for plantation work in this period. Fijians had indeed been introduced to the experience of coercive wage employment during the years of the sandalwood and beche-de-mer trades for which indigenous labour was usually procured by means of fraudulence and outright coercion on the part of recruiters. Crucial to the system of coercive recruitment of Fijians to these trades was the chiefly system, with its ability to compel the labour of both commoners and those defeated in tribal wars. Indeed, traders often relied for their labour needs on the cooperation of Fijian chiefs who committed the labour of commoners and appropriated their 'wages'.

Planters likewise recruited Fijian labour to work their plantations by bribing chiefs and chiefs most often used direct force to raise their labour quotas (France 1969:94-95 cited in Bain 1988:122). During the early years of the 1860's "a good number of Fijian labourers went not of their own free will but at the command of chiefs" into wage labour on European plantations (Seigel 1985:47). Even with the influx of Pacific Island labourers

after 1864, pressure on Fijians to take up labouring work on plantations did not cease. Legge (1958:254) notes that the Western districts of Ra and Ba and the Yasawa Islands were the main sources of forced Fijian labour for European plantations at the time of Cession. Routledge refers to the hiring out by Cakobau of the defeated Lovoni people in 1871, an act which senior colonial officials "bluntly condemned...as an act of slavery"(1985:141). The charge was later reiterated by Gordon who indeed alleged that other campaigns had been conducted with the "avowed object of aiding the exchequer by obtaining lands to sell and prisoners to dispose of" (Routledge 1985:141). The allegation that they were "disposed of" by being hired out to white planters is clear.²

Between 1871 and 1874 Fijians were also being forced into plantation employment by the imposition of a poll tax of one pound per head for every adult male and 4 shillings for every adult female, payable in cash, by the "Cakobau government". This government was, in reality, a plantocracy which had appointed Cakobau, a chief from the island of Bau in eastern Fiji, as its puppet head of state (Reddy 1974:14). Under force of the Cakobau government's poll tax, Fijians, "out of fear and ignorance", contracted "for a year or more of gratuitous service to planters willing to advance their taxes." (Bain 1988:122) Thus began the state-sponsored system of "contract labour" in Fiji.

Managing Labour Demand and Supply: the policies of the early Colonial State

The ceding of Fiji to Britain in 1874, motivated to some extent by mounting pressure in Britain to control the now scandalous Pacific Island labour trade, brought an end to that trade and to the poll tax system, both of which had been introduced to guarantee planters a supply of labour. Siegel (1985:91-2) points out that Pacific Island

labour continued to be recruited for Fiji plantations until 1911. However, many of those recruited were "old hands" brought from Queensland by agreement between the Queensland and Fiji governments following the adoption of the 'White Australia' policy and the consequent deportation of Pacific Island labourers. Their numbers were not sufficient to meet the growing demand for labour in the colony. The abolition of the poll tax system and the subsequent introduction of a number of 'native' laws, which affected ease of access to Fijian labour, were to exacerbate the problem.

Under an initial new tax law implemented immediately after cession, adult Fijian males were required to render 20 days labour a year on public works (Bain 1988:122). Two years later this labour tax was abolished and, in its stead, in accordance with what has been commonly interpreted as a protectionist native policy, introduced by Governor Arthur Gordon and followed by subsequent colonial administrations, indigenous Fijians were required to pay a tax-in-kind in the form of produce for export by the colonial government (Bain 1988:122). Ostensibly aimed at protecting or preserving the traditional order, the tax in kind had the effect of promoting commodity or cash-crop production by Fijians, who were now obliged to grow tax crops ³. This forced confinement of indigenous Fijians to peasant farming within the colonial economy (Moynagh 1981:18), achieved with the help of a number of purportedly 'protectionist' native labour ordinances which maintained Fijians as a convenient class of migrant peasant/labourers, meant that, as a 'reserve army' of labour, Fijian villagers could be conveniently used by capital and the colonial state as these interests demanded.

Naidu (1988:115) draws attention to the fact that between 1875 and 1880, planters continued to use Fijian contract labour and cites Governor Des Voeux's and Colonial Secretary Thurston's despatches to the Colonial Office indicating that in 1884 "about a quarter of adult males worked in capitalist enterprises for varying durations under contract". He argues that the colonial state introduced the Native Labour Ordinances as regulative mechanisms to slow the process of Fijian proletarianization and that these measures have been erroneously portrayed as 'protectionist', concerned with safeguarding the interests of the Fijian people.

Certainly the "protectionist" labour policy for Fijians must be seen in the context of the wider and supposedly protectionist native policy of which it was a part. The policy was motivated less by a concern to protect Fijian society from the destruction that would have followed its unmediated exposure to capitalist market forces than by sheer colonial expediency. As Gordon himself explained it:

the question how a large native population should be governed by a handful of white aliens - a question often raised but seldom satisfactorily answered - had once more to be dealt with. (Quoted in Moynagh 1981:15)

The answer, for Gordon, lay quite simply and logically in establishing legitimacy by ruling with the consent of chiefs (Moynagh 1981:15). The policy of indirect rule, however, necessarily entailed conserving, and indeed reinforcing, both the mode of production and the social relations by which chiefly rule was maintained and reproduced⁴. The orthodoxy and ideology it gave rise to were to have lasting implications for both Fijian political culture and class and race relations in Fiji.

The cornerstones of the colonial state's 'protectionist' native policy were the preservation of Fijian ownership of land; the conservation of the traditional domain of chiefly rule - the Fijian village; and the reinforcement, though compulsion of law, of traditional 'obligations' of Fijian villagers to their chiefs. Indigenous Fijians were to be made prisoners of certain social customs now universalised to the whole of Fiji and codified in colonial law. They were to be governed under a separate, 'native' administration by their own traditional leaders. Their movements and freedoms were to be severely constrained by a number of 'native' laws some of which were intended to especially constrain their freedom to engage permanently or at will in wage labour.

In 1876 and 1877 the first two of a number of native labour laws, the Native Labour Ordinances 1876 and 1877, were introduced (Bain 1988:123). Supposedly designed to prevent a mass exodus from Fijian villages and to regulate the recruitment of Fijian labour, these ordinances in fact maintained a migrant system of contract labour for Fijians. They required all employment contracts for longer than one month to be in writing, restricted contracts to no more than twelve months in total and required them to be signed by a stipendiary magistrate. They regularised working hours (10 per day) and required employers to provide rations and a statutory wage and to repatriate workers (i.e., pay the cost of return transport) on completion of their contracts. Recruiters were now technically required to have a licence to recruit labourers outside areas (i.e. provinces) of employment. The ordinances also made it illegal for coercion and/or fraud, falsehood or intimidation to be used in the recruitment of workers, although they did not outlaw the payment of "yaqona money" by recruiters to chiefs, a practice which essentially secured the cooperation of chiefs since the yaqona money constituted an advance or down-payment

(Bain 1988:125).

Chiefs continued to be the linchpin in the system of Fijian labour recruitment and they faced the dilemma of deciding between immediate advantages in cash and kind and the longer-term consequences of reduced manpower, diminished tributes and the erosion of their traditional authority (Bain 1988:125).

Although Bain (1988) demonstrates the fallacy and ineffectiveness of protection offered by these and subsequent native labour ordinances, their introduction, at least on the surface, was suggestive of stringent controls on the use of 'native' labour. As such, they "unleash(ed) a furious response from the planter community" (Bain 1989:123).

The Indian Indentured Labour Scheme

Having put constraints on the use of native labour, and on the importation of island labour, the colonial government was now obliged to provide an assured supply of cheap labour to white planters, many of whom were in debt. More particularly, it had to assure labour supply to the Colonial Sugar Refining Company of Sydney (CSR), which extended its activities to Fiji in 1880. The CSR had been persuaded by the colonial government to set up operations in Fiji partly in the hope that the introduction of large-scale commercial capital would relieve the state's financial insolvency.

Gordon, who had earlier seen the operation of Indian indentured labour schemes in Mauritius and Trinidad, had proposed to planters soon after his arrival in the colony the introduction of a similar scheme in Fiji. As reported in the **Fiji Times**, he argued that:

An ample and steady supply of labour is absolutely essential to the Colony. From whence and under what management shall we obtain it more certainly and most cheaply and with the least possibility of abuse?...I am of the opinion that it should be undertaken by government. (FT 8.9.1875)

Specifically, he proposed the engagement by the government of indentured labour from India:

The supply of labour which is to be obtained from India is practically boundless. The amount of wages ordinarily given to Indian coolies is well known. I hold in my hand some statistics as to the probable expenses of their introduction here. My calculations are 3 pounds 18 shillings the expense for recruiting; 10 shillings a head per man for the agent; passage money 12 pounds 18 shillings and 8 pence; we obtain a coolie servant for five years with his wages of 5 pence a day additional with rations. (FT 8.9.1875)

The curious irony of the British colonial government introducing, indeed underwriting, an indentured labour scheme in the colony to replace the scandalous Pacific Island Labour Trade was seemingly lost in the defence that procurement of Indian indentured labour would be regulated by colonial authorities at both ends of the scheme and would therefore be above abuse. Systems of indenture had in fact been introduced 'successfully' to most of Britain's colonies in the Caribbean and to Mauritius and Malaysia following the abolition of slavery in 1834 and the consequent threatened demise of these plantation economies. British colonial administrations had been centrally involved in these indenture schemes and their interests were not simply to ensure the economic viability of the colonies but, more importantly, to aid the establishment of capitalism (Saunders 1984). The case of Fiji was little different.

Gordon's proposal was not at first popular with the planters who believed Pacific Island labourers were cheaper and superior. The CSR, however, opted to pioneer the engagement of Indian indentured labourers on its estates. Between 1879 and 1916, when the indenture system was finally abolished after a long campaign in India, Britain and Fiji against its many abuses, 60,553 men and women had fulfilled employment contracts - usually lasting 10 years - under the scheme. Paid wages that fell below the declared statutory minimum, and labouring under conditions of extreme coercion and degradation that have left their imprint on the Indo-Fijian psyche, the Indian immigrant labourers were not passive. Theirs was an experience of continuous and enduring struggle and resistance and of intermittent revolts against the combined might of capital and the colonial state.

By 1879 then, the colonial state had resolved the problem of assuring a supply of labour, especially for sugar capital. The only remaining problem with labour now was its control. The problem that combined action by workers could pose for the colonial state made it necessary that the state provide the very means by which labour would be controlled - legislation and the machinery for its enforcement. Needless to say, legislation prescribed both the terms of contract labour and the penalties for breaches of contract overwhelmingly in the employer's favour. As Bain (1989:129) aptly puts it:

the state ultimately endorsed a relationship between master and servant which was unambiguously one of domination and subordination. The criminalisation of a labourer's breach of contract through the application of penal sanctions was one of the more conspicuous marks of this relationship.

The controversial penal sanctions for failure to work that underlay the colony's labour laws would remain on the statutes until 1947 despite pressure from the Colonial Office in

London from 1916 for repeal of the Ordinances to delete these clauses. Their retention by the colonial state was a testimony to the power and influence of sugar capital which vehemently opposed the idea of removing the clauses from the labour laws. The CSR even went so far as to lobby the Secretary of State for the Colonies on the matter in 1923, urging him to "set his face against any attempts by the Indian Committee to upset matters in the colony" (MP 4285/23). The company saw the penal clauses as both necessary and appropriate to the system of "labour agreements" in the colony given the "classes of labour employed".

'Whatever may be the position in advanced democracies it is futile to claim that with the classes of labour employed in the Colony there should be no means of enforcing the observance of agreements and though we realise that in the present temper of political ideas there would be little chance of these clauses finding a place in a new ordinance, it is surely better in the circumstances above to leave well alone' (General Manager of CSR to the Governor 7.5.24 MP 637/24).

And so leave well alone the colonial government did, in respect of its controversial labour laws. That these and other draconian laws provided the main means by which both Indian and Fijian labour were controlled is evident in the following account of control and resistance up until the late 1930's.

Control and Resistance: Indian Labour

Indentured Indian labourers were mainly employed on the sugar plantations, where they worked as field labourers. A significant proportion were also engaged in skilled and unskilled work in the mills while a much smaller, 'privileged', number were put to work in the homes of their European bosses. In the fields the workers were expected to work five days a week and were paid 12 pence for nine hours of work or upon completion of a

'task' - which was set as the "amount of work an ordinary man could do in six hours' steady work" (Naidu 1980:11). Women were paid 9 pence for nine hours of work or on completion of a task which was set at three quarters of a man's task. Failure to complete a task or refusal to do so incurred prosecution under the Immigration Ordinance and a fine or imprisonment on conviction, together with the extension of indenture to cover the number of days lost (Naidu 1980:12).

The provision for penal sanctions under the Immigration Ordinance underlined the coercive nature of the indenture system under which men and women were "contracted" to perform, for a minimum of five years, tasks set by the employer for rates of pay unilaterally determined by them. The contract was never renegotiable, its duration was unfairly long, there was no right to withdraw labour in protest over abuses and indeed failure even to fulfil the contract's daily requirements resulted in arbitrary extension of contracts as well as a fine or imprisonment. More significantly, the penal sanction underlined the role of the state as the upholder of the interests of employers. Although labour ordinances stipulated minimum standards and conditions of employment to 'protect' the workers from extreme abuse, there were fewer penal sanctions provided against offending employers and indeed it was difficult to prosecute companies which breached the laws (Naidu 1980:31).

Wages provided by employers to the indentured workers were meagre. What is more, although a legal minimum daily wage was set at 1 shilling for men and 9 pence for women, in reality deductions made for sickness, absenteeism and non-completion of tasks often whittled down wages to well below the legal minimum. Workers were often

subjected to extreme brutality at the hands of overseers and endured extremely poor and dehumanising living conditions. Housed in "lines" (barracks) in which rooms measured 10' x 7', the labourers lived three and four to a room. So wretched were these conditions, they were described by the labourers as 'narak' or hell and the abnormal social relations imposed by the indenture system contributed to illness and despair amongst the workers. This is illustrated by the high rate of violence - suicide, rape and murder - amongst workers in the lines (Naidu 1980:43-75).

Although, as Lal (1986) points out, workers generally survived by avoiding open resistance⁵, covert resistance in the form of go-slows, absenteeism and other means of subversion was commonly practiced. Moreover, Indo-Fijian labour history is punctuated by a number of incidents in which workers took overt action in solidarity, most often spontaneously, in reaction to their poor wages and the harsh working and living conditions to which they were subjected.

The first of these actions occurred in 1886 and took the form of strikes by Indian indentured labourers at Navuso and Koronivia. The cause was over-tasking, underpay and the vindictive attitude of management (Gillion 1962:83; Lal 1984:145). The Koronivia revolt involved a march to Suva from Koronivia by indentured labourers, armed with knives and sticks, to deliver a complaint to the Agent-General of Immigration. The revolt resulted in the ringleaders being fined and, more significantly, following investigation and an appeal for greater control over the labourers by the planters,⁶ in the passage of the colony's first punitive labour law - Ordinance No XIV of 1886 (later amended by Ordinance No VI of 1887). Unashamedly hailed by the *Fiji Times* as "an enactment

positively unique in the history of Fiji (i.e.) an Ordinance framed in the interests of employers", the ordinance stiffened existing penalties for failure to complete tasks or for absence from work. It made a six-month prison sentence mandatory for a third consecutive offence of absence from work, forbade Indians to smoke or use fire in any part of a plantation except the lines and, most importantly, made it illegal for more than five labourers employed in the same plantation to absent themselves without obtaining leave for the purpose, even to lay complaints. Significantly, the Ordinance also prevented labourers from taking combined action against their employers (Lal 1984:146).

Further strikes by indentured Indian workers occurred in 1888, 1907 and 1913 (Gillion:1962:88,48,49). At Labasa, for a period up until 1903, unrest and disturbances by labour were so intense and continuous that the situation was described as "almost a state of civil war" (Gillion 1962:115). So extremely harsh and humiliating were the conditions of indenture that most of the immigrants, after completing their terms, were loath to seek wage employment for the free wage of 1 shilling a day for more than short periods at a time and settled instead on land leased from Fijians. Consequently, with the cancellation of all remaining indentures in 1920, the CSR and European planters faced an acute labour problem, a shortage that was only partially abated by a rapid increase in the recruitment of Fijian labourers for the sugar industry under the Masters & Servants Ordinance (McNaught 1982:102).

The end of indenture in fact sounded the death knell for plantation agriculture in Fiji. The CSR, aware that only with a system of small-holding family farms which free Indians could manage without the need of externally contracted labour could it survive the

crisis in production, encouraged European planters to quit their lands with the advice that they would not survive and should cut their losses and sell out (Narsey 1979). Then, in an ingenious move, the company reorganised its production, dividing its estates and those acquired from the planters into small farm lots and offering them to Indian farmers on lease. By this means Indians were transformed from labourers to tenant-farmers. However, since they now assumed the burden and costs of cane production for the CSR, which retained a monopoly on milling, the material conditions of their existence changed little, if at all. Not surprisingly, the first efforts to unionise workers (or farmers as they now were) emerged within this industry. Although attempts to establish growers' unions began in the 1920's, none was successful until 1937 when the Kisan Sangh (Farmers Association) was successfully formed⁷. Other farmers unions, including the Akhil Fiji Krishak Maha Sangh (All Fiji Farmers' Union), and the Rewa Farmers' Union followed. In 1940, a Sugar Workers Union (Mazdur Sangh) was formed.

In 1920 and 1921, two significant strikes were staged by Indian workers. Although both strikes were over wages, the cost of living and conditions of work, they were interpreted by the colonial government as political agitation inspired by the nationalist struggle in India, rather than as struggles of a labouring class to increase their wages.⁸ Both strikes ended with the deportation of Indian nationals identified as the principal instigators of the trouble because they acted as counsels or representatives of the workers. Significantly, both strikes resulted in new control mechanisms being adopted by the colonial government to contain what was essentially the beginnings of labour militancy.

The 1920 strike began with Indian labourers employed in the Public Works Department in Suva. The first strike in which the colonial government was involved as an employer (Ali 1980:46), it soon spread to employees of the Suva Municipal Council, the CSR and the Vancouver-Fiji Sugar Company estates in Rewa and Navua and to government and municipal workers at Levuka. The colonial government interpreted the strike as political and Governor Rodwell "intended to coerce the strikers into returning to work" (Ali 1980:46). Twelve Fijian and 20 European constables and the machine-gun section of the Defence Force were brought out to disperse a crowd of 1000 workers which gathered to try to rescue three fellow-strikers imprisoned on charges of intimidation. Restrictions were imposed on the movement and gathering of Indians (Ali 1980: 46-47). The Defence Force was mobilised for action in both Suva and Nausori and the Governor also sought (and was assured of) assistance from abroad for a "show of force" (Ali & Mamak 1979:85-87; Ali 1980:46). From Australia, he was promised "ninety ratings, a gunboat and a light cruiser".

The arrival of a New Zealand warship and troops during the strike provoked acts of violence by strikers - namely the destruction of the Nasinu and Nausori bridges and the cutting of telephone wires linking Suva and Nausori (Ali 1980:51). But the two main incidents during the month-long strike were firstly, a riot which broke out following an attempt by a European Constable and his Fijian Special Constable to arrest an Indian woman strike supporter⁹ and secondly, a clash between police and "two or three hundred Indians" at Samabula which resulted in an armed constabulary opening fire on a large number of strikers, fatally injuring one of them (Ali 1980:51, 54). The latter incident abruptly ended the strike. As an immediate consequence of the strike, however, a further

legislative control was introduced. The Public Safety Ordinance, speedily enacted in February 1920, was immediately used to convict and imprison the strike's ringleaders while a prominent Indian lawyer and supporter of the struggle of Indians in Fiji, Manilal Maganlal Doctor, was summarily deported.

The 1921 strike by sugar workers lasted for six months. The colonial government recognised that the strike had been precipitated by the Company's intransigence over improving the terms and conditions of its labourers and noted the unsympathetic attitude of company managers towards their labourers (Ali 1980:82). Nonetheless, it considered the major force and inspiration behind the strike, "newly-arrived missionary from India", Basisth Muni, a political agitator who was bent on fostering non-cooperation with the colony's British rulers and on fomenting dissent among Indians in areas where no grievance had been voiced (Ali 1980:94). Muni, it seems, was responsible for drawing up a 14-point log of claims for the striking workers. These claims led Europeans in the colony to conclude that Indians "really wanted equality with whites" (Ali 1980:80). Certainly the workers did demand fair treatment as labourers, on a par with their white counterparts in Australia and New Zealand¹⁰. Muni was deported one month after the strike commenced but this merely strengthened the strikers in their resolve. For a further five months they held out, growing food and retaining food surpluses for their own consumption in order to survive.

The colonial government took the usual precautionary measures - prohibiting assemblies of more than 20 without permits and banning public meetings. Additionally, it employed a new and effective strategy to defeat the workers. By soliciting the help of

indigenous chiefs, who brought in Fijian villagers as strike breakers, it introduced the practice of divide and rule - pitting indigenous Fijian labour reserves against Indian workers. Brewster (1922) lauded the ingenuity of the move:

The DC, with a happy flash of genius, called in the local Fijian chiefs to aid him by their advice. They at once took the bull by the horns and called their people to come to the rescue of their white brethren. They issued a manifesto that they understood Britain always stood by those in trouble and now was the time to show they were true Britons and one of the empire. The result was that the able-bodied Fijians took the places of strikers in the fields and the mills. Their timely aid broke the strike and caused the Indians to resume work (Brewster 1922:301).

This first successful exercise in coopting Fijian chiefs to contain or subvert labour militancy was to be repeated many times by the colonial government.

After the 1921 strike and up until the 1940's, overt strike action by Indian workers became less frequent testifying to the effectiveness of the colonial state's coercive/cooptive policy of labour control. However, industrial conflict in the sugar industry, in which Indians were mainly engaged, continued unabated from the 1920's into the war years. This conflict increasingly became manifest as one between growers and the CSR company.

Control and Resistance: Fijian Labour

Control over indigenous Fijian labour was ensured mainly through the maintenance of a system of migrant contract labour, effected by means of the Native Labour Ordinances. Restrictions imposed by the first two Native Labour Ordinances have already been mentioned. After 1883 the Native Labour Ordinances also required labourers to have, in addition, written contracts for any engagements outside of their designated "home

district" and the consent of their chief (buli) and village headman (Turaga-ni-Koro) before being registered by a European stipendiary magistrate (Bain 1988:123)¹¹. Government was also given discretionary powers in 1883 to close districts to further recruitment and adult Fijian males could be prohibited from contracting if their employment was judged as conflicting with their communal obligations in the district (Bain 1988:123). Also, from 1880, following complaints from the Council of Chiefs, employers were required to repatriate workers to their villages within 14 days of the expiry of their labour contracts. From 1899 until 1912, chiefs were empowered to prosecute "unauthorised absentees" under the Native Trespass and Vagrancy Order 1899. Although this was not effective in practice, due to the fact that many Fijians contracted under the Masters & Servants Ordinance of 1890, which did not require labourers to obtain the consent of the Buli or Turaga-ni-Koro (Bain 1988:127), the provision existed as a constraining device and could be invoked.¹²

The Native Labour Ordinances provided other mechanisms by which Fijian labour, once contracted, was controlled. The contract system was an indenture system and in many respects as Bain puts it:

Indentured Fijians were subjected to a scale of oppression comparable with that of their Melanesian and Indian counterparts. Once signed, contracts were not renegotiable; and even at the outset of an engagement, the cultural norms of Fijian society dictated that the terms were usually negotiated by non-labouring traditional chiefs (1988:129).

Penal sanctions in the ordinances, which European planters considered "vitally necessary for the proper control of native labour", criminalised a labourer's breach of contract. Under the 1876 Native Labour Ordinance, second-time absconders who were absent for 5

consecutive days were liable to a maximum of 60 days' imprisonment with hard labour. "Wilful misconduct" and "ill behaviour" were "punishable offences" which could incur a fine or 9 months' imprisonment with hard labour (Bain 1988:130). The Native Labour Ordinances also allowed the payment of part or all of a worker's wage to be deferred until the end of the contract. And, from 1886, employers were permitted to pay by task rather than by the hour, enabling exploitation of Fijian labourers on an intense scale. (Bain 1988:131-2).

Generally, the system of migrant contract labour, enforced by means of the native labour ordinances, militated against the emergence of a fully-fledged Fijian proletariat and the development of worker organisations amongst Fijian labour. It also functioned to shore up chiefly control of Fijian commoners while ensuring a controlled reserve labour system. The provisions in the native labour ordinances safeguarding employers' absolute control over contracted workers underscored the colonial state's subordination of Fijian labour to the interests of plantation capital.

Despite the constraining effects of the system of migrant contract labour, combined action by Fijian labourers did occur. Bain (1988:132) refers to an "outbreak of disturbances on labour lines in Lautoka in 1900" by Fijian labourers reacting to CSR's implementation of the 1895 Fijian Labour Ordinance, which allowed employers to now pay a Fijian worker less than the full minimum daily rate if he failed to complete a task.¹³ Other hidden forms of labour protest were also apparent.

Additionally, there were at least two early attempts by Fijian workers to form workers' organisations. Both these efforts involved European "instigators" who were evidently approached by the workers for support and assistance. Hince (1981) has documented the first effort by Fijian workers to form a trade union. The abortive attempt to form the Fijian Wharf Labourers' Union in 1916 during a four-day strike by native labourers employed at Lautoka wharf by the CSR and Union Steamship (USS) companies drew swift action from the colonial government. It considered deporting the strike's instigator, a European, Edward Sanday, for agitating the natives, the consequences of which could have been 'serious to the general peace and good order' (Hince 1981:9). It also considered retiring and cancelling the pension of Sanday's closest Fijian supporter, Seteriki Nasoki, a Buli in the native administration, and introducing new legislation "to deal with persons agitating the coloured labour and thereby causing strikes" (Hince 1981:11). The strike was broken by the Companies' shipment of 50 scab workers from Suva aboard a government vessel, accompanied by six constables and a non-commissioned officer "partly full armed without ammunition" as temporary reinforcement for the Lautoka police (Hince 1981:6). Sanday was advised that

His Excellency is unable to view with favour any organisation amongst Fijians which is likely to lead to strikes amongst native labourers. The Governor is of the opinion that the objects which he understands you have in view might be served by other means and he is confident that if there are just grounds for complaint as regards to the quality of the food supplied to the labourers, representation on the subject by the labourers in the lines will receive the consideration they deserve. (Hince 1981:13)

No more was heard of the Wharf Labourers' Union.

Eight years later, in 1924, Fijian labourers on CSR estates apparently made numerous representations through their Fijian 'sirdars' or overseers to a European lawyer at Ba, Mr N.S. Chalmers. He, in response, called a meeting on his property with the object of forming a Fijian and Indian Workers Union and pressing for reform of the colony's labour laws - in particular, the abolition of its penal clauses. In a meeting with the Governor, Chalmers said discontent amongst Fijians over conditions of work, and especially over existing penal clauses in the labour laws which were resulting in vast numbers of them being imprisoned for being absent from work for a day, would lead to a general strike; indeed that the Fijians had told him they were going to strike. As it happened, no strike took place and Chalmers did not form the union he had in mind, but the fact that he had held a meeting of Fijian labourers had ruffled feathers. In order to allay continuing interest in the matter by Fijians, it was considered necessary to place a paragraph in the government's Fijian language newspaper, Na Mata, explaining that the government had informed Chalmers that the matter of amending the labour laws was in hand. Chalmers was castigated by the Governor for even contemplating forming a labour union of Fijian workers:

You know it is always a risky thing to inculcate into the minds of native labour what you might call an idea of mass action. In native countries it cannot be anything but dangerous. (MP C9/24)

Twenty-two Fijians, all workers on CSR Estates, were prosecuted by the CSR for labour offences in connection with the incident. The charge was "neglecting to perform duty". The court heard that they had walked to Rarawai to attend the "big meeting" at Chalmers' property, returning with "swollen knees and feet" from the walk. One of the labourers, Eramasi, questioned closely about what transpired at the meeting, why they had

gone, what Chalmers had told them and what fees they had paid him, told the court simply:

We were having to work so hard (dredre) in the lines, we hoped there was a chance he (Chalmers) might tell us something that would lessen our work.
(MP C9/24)

The other twenty-one endorsed Eramasi's statement, saying he "speaks for us all" (MP C9/24).

On the matter of legislative reform, Chalmers was apparently assured that amendments were already in hand. A committee, he was told, had been set up to look into them. A report was to be considered by the Executive Council and a draft of an amended law would soon be sent to the Secretary of State for the Colonies (MP C9/24). However, the suggested amendments never reached the Secretary of State for the Colonies. They were opposed outright by CSR and other companies who were consulted by the colonial government. The penal clauses - the main bone of contention - remained on the statutes until 1947 when they were finally abolished with the passage of Labour Ordinance No 23 of that year.

The only other significant attempt by Fijians to organise themselves into a union before 1940 occurred in 1933. In this instance too, the formation of the Fijian Teachers' Association was instigated by two Europeans - the Director of Education and the Principal of Queen Victoria School. The FTA's formation, however, constituted a breakaway move by indigenous Fijian teachers from the Fiji Teachers' Union (Thiele 1976:34) and the role of the two Europeans was divisive. The Fiji Teachers Union had itself been formed in

1931 through a merger of two teachers unions which were also originally established by Europeans employed at Methodist and governments schools in 1924 and 1928. These efforts followed the formation by Europeans of an association of civil servants in 1921. It is significant to note that while the colonial government opposed the idea of organisations of Fijian labour, European white-collar workers were permitted to organise.

In the early colonial period then, the critical role played by the colonial state is apparent: firstly in procuring labour for capital on terms favourable to the latter; secondly in coercing labourers who had been contracted to perform work for their employers by criminalising labourers' breaches of contract; and thirdly, by suppressing collective action by workers and frustrating or subverting their efforts to organise. Long after the abolition of both the Pacific Island labour trade and the Indian indenture system, and despite the existence of purportedly protective native labour ordinances, Fijian and Indian labourers in Fiji remained 'unfree', in bondage to employers under a contract system of labour that the colonial state enforced. This was an era of unabashed, undisguised coercion by the state on behalf of capital.

The Change in Colonial Labour Policy

As the 1930's drew to a close, however, and later with the effects of changes ushered in by the Second World War, the colonial state in Fiji, in conformity with colonial labour reforms throughout the British empire, altered its practice of overt coercion. A more subtle strategy of control, based on the nurturing of moderate labour unions and the cooption of its leaders, was adopted.

The radical change in colonial labour policy that occurred in the 1940's resulted in the establishment of a labour office, the enactment of legislation to give formal rights to trade unions and the adoption of a conscious policy of forming labour unions. These developments were in keeping with the first comprehensive labour policy adopted by the Colonial Office in London. The four cornerstones of the policy involved: enacting legislation to give formal rights to trade unions; establishing a labour office or department within each colonial administration and seconding experienced British trade unionists to these offices; actively encouraging the development of the trade union movement; and creating Labour Advisory Boards within each colony with equal representation of employers and workers. Extolling the virtues of Britain's new labour policy for the colonies, B.C. Roberts wrote:

what has been unique about the development of trade unions in (the colonies) is the fact that they were actively promoted by the United Kingdom government. At a time when there had been few manifestations of the desire to organise, the British government introduced a policy which deliberately encouraged the growth of unions and the establishment of a system of industrial relations modelled on that which had emerged in Britain' (Roberts, 1964: xv).

The new labour policy did not simply represent enlightened or prescient judgement as Roberts suggests. Nor did it emerge in a context in which there had been "few manifestations of the desire to organise", as Roberts claims. The policy change was primarily motivated by self-interest and emerged in large part as a direct response to events taking place in the colonies. It was also partly the result of international attention paid to what was happening in the colonies by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Prior to 1930, the Colonial Office had had no labour policy as such (Roberts 1964:170-171). Colonial administrations were afforded a free hand in determining policy on labour matters and, as we have seen in the case of Fiji, most often they did so with the interests of European capital foremost in mind - introducing and 'regulating' indenture labour schemes that involved the transportation of labour from one colony to another to supply plantations and mines operated by European capital and/or adopting policies compelling indigenous people to take up wage employment. In both cases, legislation usually provided both the means of assuring capital of a contracted labour force and measures with which to ensure that workers did not combine to take action against either the owners of capital or the state.

The fact that colonial administrations took upon themselves wide powers of discretion in matters of labour policy did not necessarily mean that the Colonial Office was unaware of their policies or actions. By the end of World War 1, however, and particularly with the creation in 1919 of the ILO, which focussed international attention on labour standards in the territories of ILO member nations, the Colonial Office began to be held accountable for what went on in the colonies. Labour conditions in Britain's East African territories became the uncomfortable subject of several petitions and parliamentary debates during the 1920's and a number of despatches were sent to the Governors of these territories by the Secretary of State to the Colonies.¹⁴ By the 1930's, the Colonial Office was also confronted with the growing reality of nationalist movements and other manifestations of popular organisation and resistance in the colonies. Recognising the wider political implications of workers organising spontaneously or independently, it began to see wisdom in promoting worker organisations, so long as they could be made to

conform with a model of unionism circumscribed by law and be sympathetically supervised and guided to ensure their 'proper development' (Roberts 1964:178).

It is in this context that the despatches to the colonies from Secretaries of State for the Colonies, Sidney Webb and W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore in 1930 and 1937 respectively, should be read. Indeed Webb's dispatch, which directed colonial governments to pass legislation to give formal rights to trade unions,¹⁵ stressed the importance of supervising organisations of labour. Webb emphasised that without such supervision workers could fall under the 'domination of disaffected persons, by whom their activities might be diverted to improper and mischievous ends' (Bowen 1954:4). He specifically recommended, to those drafting legislation, the compulsory registration of trade unions (Roberts 1964:178). Provision for compulsory registration was a significant feature of India's Trade Union Act, introduced in 1929 in an effort to control militant unionism. As Roberts (1964:172) recounts, the alleged involvement of Indian and British 'communists' in the rapid flowering of Indian trade unions in the 1920's and in the upsurge of labour strikes in that decade led the Indian colonial administration to arrest leading Indian communists and to introduce a Trade Union Act.¹⁶ As with the passage of the Trade Union Act in India, actual implementation of the new labour policy in other colonies would follow events in those colonies and would essentially be aimed at containing and controlling the incipient challenge presented by newly-emergent labour movements to the colonial state.

Although not much happened in the colonies for ten years following Webb's dispatch, by 1940 a revolution of sorts began to take place throughout the empire,

stimulated in part by the Colonial Welfare and Development Act (1940), which made economic assistance from Britain for capital works conditional upon the existence of "reasonable facilities for the establishment and activities of trade unions" and upon "fair conditions of labour (being) observed in carrying out the works".¹⁷ A report issued by the Colonial Office in 1941 and tabled at the ILO Conference in New York that year, entitled 'Supervision of Conditions under which Labour is Employed in the Colonial Empire', detailed the rapid progress that had already been made in implementing the policy. The development of free labour organisations was being encouraged as was the establishment of advisory boards, arbitration courts and conciliation and wages boards. New Labour Departments had been formed and legislation introduced to improve working conditions and raise the standards of living. Experienced British trade unionists were trained to go out to the colonies as labour advisors to "help native workers to realise their ideals" and experienced officers of the Ministry of Labour were seconded to colonial governments. The number of colonies with labour departments rose in four years from 11 to 23 (CSO FA 115/26/1).

The Establishment of a Labour Department in Fiji

In Fiji, the colonial administration apparently took voluntary steps to implement the policy late in 1939. Without awaiting the secondment of an experienced officer from the Labour Department in Britain, it appointed one of its former colonial officers, Stuart Reay, as Industrial Relations Officer. At the time of his appointment, Reay was in England on leave. Preparation for his new job included a few weeks at the Ministry of Labour in London and visits to the labour departments of Mauritius - "to study modern treatment of labour problems" - and North and Southern Rhodesia, the Belgian Congo and the Rand

and Natal in South Africa, before returning to Fiji in January 1940 (Annual Report of the Industrial Relations Officer 1940). Two years later, with the establishment of a Labour Department, Reay became the first Commissioner of Labour, a post he held until his retirement in 1953. It was in these first 14 years that the Labour Department enacted legislation to give formal rights to trade unions and embarked on a policy of promoting the formation of trade unions. This radical change in the colonial state's official stance on labour unions in Fiji, from one of "overt hostility to active promotion" (Howard 1985:2), is what we now turn to examine.

Endnotes

1. Many of these land claims were highly suspect and a Lands Claims Commission appointed in 1875 (which reported back in 1882) recognised only 414, 615 acres as having been properly alienated to Europeans (Narayan 1984:24). Between 1905 and 1908, a further 104,142 acres of Fijian land were alienated under the governorship of Sir Everard Im Thurn.
2. Routledge argues that Gordon's inability to quote examples weakened the force of his allegations, and that the allegations of slavery stemmed from prejudiced minds that did not understand the Fijian polity. Routledge's argument is that the rules of war in the Fijian polity gave the victor the right to "do as he pleased" with the land and people he conquered. As he put it: "conquered people knew what to expect. An (isoro) would be demanded, its presentation indicating that the land and people were for the victor to do with as he pleased" (1985:141).
3. Between 1875 and 1879 export earnings from the produce of Fijians accounted for 30 per cent of total state revenue. Sutherland points out the significance to capital of this contribution: "to the extent that the state's financial needs were met by peasant taxes, the tax pressure on capital was correspondingly reduced" (1984:86). Peasant production, in other words, contributed generally to the reproduction of European capital. By 1884, Fijians were producing 8,884 tons (about 12 per cent) of the total cane crushed that year; by 1900, their output had reached 15,447 tons. Moynagh (1981:18) notes the extreme duress under which Fijians produced cane and their hostility to the compulsion to do so.
4. By 'mode of production' I mean the "way in which surplus is produced and its use controlled" (Bottomore et. al. 1983:337). In the Fiji context, the pre-capitalist mode of production to which I refer has been variously termed a "chiefly mode of production" (Naidu 1988:62) and a "tributary mode of production" (Sutherland 1984). In this mode of production chiefs were the "centres of accumulation and redistribution" (Naidu 1988:65).
5. This is not to say that open resistance did not occur. Sixty-one percent of reported charges by indentured labourers against employers in the years 1886-1897 concerned incidents of battery and assault (Leckie 1990). Moreover, workers sometimes delivered violence against supervisors and properly (See Naidu 1980:56-69).
6. According to Lal (1984:146), Ordinance No XIV was Governor Thurston's response to planter anxieties about "growing Indian insubordination", and to their complaints to the colonial government that the economy, "already in a desperate state, would collapse" if the problem was not dealt immediately. He also mentions a statement from one Inspector Caruthers that the Koronivia strike represented "a growing disregard for the power and punishment of the law" and that greater control over the labourers was required.

7. The earliest effort at unionisation was made in October 1920 when the 'Fiji Indian Labour Federation' - a union of Indian cane growers and labourers - was formed. The "driving force behind the union was a Bengal-born teacher resident at Nadi, N.B. Mitter, who was elected President. The Union presented a log of claims to the CSR but was denied recognition by the colonial government and the company, the latter seeing the Federation as headed by "agitators incapable of representing the best interests of the workers" (Ali 1980:77). The company's intransigent attitude towards demands put to it by the Federation led to the 1921 strike.
8. The 1921 Colonial Report for instance, while acknowledging that there was "little doubt...that the fundamental cause" (of a strike by Indian workers in the sugar industry that began in February that year), "was economic in character consequent upon..increased cost of living", went on to add that "political agitation in sympathy with the national movement in India" had "fanned the discontent". The CSR and other planters insisted that the aim of the strike was political not economic and was one of "fomenting sedition by making economic redress impossible through extremism" (Ali 1980:80). The 1920 strike was similarly reviewed as political by Governor Rodwell (Ali 1980:46).
9. Ali discusses the role of Indian women in the 1920 strike, citing Rodwell's view that "gangs of women of the lowest class were organised to intimidate workers with obscene language and filthy practices" and the Fiji Times' (9/2/20) warning that "Indian women are being organised into intimidation parties of six and eight". (1980:148-50). In the February 11 riot, Indian women strike supporters beat up two policemen who tried to arrest one of them.
10. Details of the strikers' 16 demands are outlined in Ali (1980:79-80).
11. The provision requiring consent of the chief (buli) was withdrawn in 1888.
12. Bain points out the fallacy of protection afforded Fijian labour by the Native Labour Ordinances and says many planters and Fijian labourers escaped these controls by contracting under the Masters and Servants Ordinance of 1898 to which practice the colonial government in Fiji turned a blind eye.
13. The 1895 ordinance explicitly defined task work for Fijian labour. The definition was that used for task work where Indian labour was concerned and meant: "any work the pay for which is estimated by the amount performed irrespective of the time occupied in its performance" (cited in Bain 1988:132).
14. Of particular embarrassment was Kenya where forced labour and other extreme measures were sanctioned by the colonial government to 'encourage' workers to enter wage employment.
15. The despatch of W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore contained similar urging and declared that "workers are entitled to a fair share of the improvements in the financial position of the colonies" (Roberts 1964).

16. As Roberts explains it, the events in India - particularly the arrest of active communist members of trade unions and their trial at Meerut for seditious activity - provoked a storm of protest in Britain and sharply divided opinion within the British labour movement. It was largely for this reason that, on its return to power in 1929, the Labour Government of Ramsay MacDonald gave some priority to colonial labour matters (Roberts 1964:172-174).
17. This provision in the Act was "permissive" rather than "mandatory" according to Morgan (1980:124), who suggests that the Colonial Office and colonial governments did not take the purpose of Section 1(2) (a) of the Act - ie the encouragement of trade unions - very seriously at all. He cites the case of an inquiry from the High Commissioner of Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland where there was no legislation recognising trade unions. The High Commissioner was assured that "providing he was satisfied there was nothing in the law to prevent trade unions being formed and functioning, the scheme in question might be commenced" (Morgan 1980:124).

CHAPTER THREE

THE LABOUR POLICY AND PRACTICES OF THE COLONIAL STATE IN FIJI 1942-1956

Introduction

The new labour policy adopted by the colonial government in Fiji and the practices of the Labour Department as a new office or agency within the colonial state were aimed at both managing the 'labour problem', latent or apparent, and preventing the emergence or development of an independent, militant and politically-conscious labour movement in Fiji. This chapter covers the period from 1940 - when the foundation for a Labour Department was laid with Reay's appointment - to 1956, just prior to the emergence of a new phase of trade union militancy. It examines the enactment of the Industrial Associations Ordinance of 1942, the first ordinance providing for the existence of trade unions, within the context of independent attempts to form general workers' unions; the passage of the Industrial Disputes (Conciliation and Arbitration) Ordinance in the same year, an ordinance designed in the interests of the colonial economy and of capital; the seemingly contradictory roles played by the department in creating trade unions amongst unorganised Fijian workers on the one hand, while employing various mechanisms and ideologies to contain and disorganise them on the other; the co-option of the first peak organisation of labour unions and the subversion of unions which defied the approved model or otherwise did not meet with the department's approval. It is argued that the function of the Labour Department, as part of the apparatus of the colonial state, was essentially political, that is, to contain and co-opt labour through the enactment of constraining legislation, the encouragement or establishment of unions (especially within

major unorganised industries dominated by indigenous Fijian workers) and, where necessary, the creation of alternative industrial relations machinery.

When Reay took up his appointment in January 1940 the Masters and Servants Ordinance of 1890 and the Fijian Labour Ordinance of 1899 were still on the statutes. The survival of the contract labour system and of penal sanctions in these laws was both a testimony to the colonial state's continued role in safeguarding the interest of employers (as opposed to that of workers) and a continuing source of embarrassment to the Colonial Office. Several times over the previous two decades the Colonial Office had impressed upon the colonial government in Fiji the urgent need to repeal those laws, but without success (See MP 637/24; MP 4285/23). In 1939, just prior to Reay's appointment, the Secretary of State for the Colonies had written to the Administration in Fiji asking for an overhaul of the colony's labour laws and the abolition, in particular, of its penal clauses. He pointed out especially the need to delete the penal clause relating to harbouring workers who had left their employers before their contracts were complete (Minutes 18.8.41 F36/32). The request was ignored and two reminder cables had to be sent before the Governor, Sir Harry Luke, sent a reply two years later.

Although some officers of the colonial government might have shared the opinion of the Colonial Office that the contract labour system and penal sanctions were repugnant to modern conceptions of labour relations, there was a great deal of reticence about actually amending the laws. The government most often found itself catering to the interests of plantation and commercial capital, especially the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, the colony's largest employer whose interests it always took into account and

whom it often consulted. It thus circumvented or simply ignored directives from the Colonial Office (MP 637/24; MP 4285/23). It was also given to rationalising the retention of the contract system at least for some industries, notably the copra industry.¹ And capital's view that penal sanctions were necessary came to be tacitly shared by colonial officials. As late as 1939, colonial officers were arguing that any new legislation should incorporate penal clauses (Minutes 8.14.39 F36/32). Knowing that no new legislation with such provisions would make it past the Colonial Office, but that the Secretary of State for the Colonies

‘might not feel obliged to order the repeal of such clauses from existing legislation (Minute from Attorney General, 16.1.39 F36/32)

the colonial government effectively decided not to tamper with the laws, although it went through the motions of drafting a bill to repeal them in 1943. Consequently, the ordinances remained intact until 1947, when Labour Ordinance No.23 was finally passed by the Legislative Council.

This is not to say that the drafting of labour legislation was not considered a priority by the colonial government in this period. Two bills drafted in 1941 were in fact considered urgent, the Industrial Associations Ordinance and the Industrial Disputes (Conciliation and Arbitration) Ordinance. Both laws were necessary for the implementation of the colonial government's new labour policy as we shall see.

Subverting the Development of General Unions

When the proposed Industrial Associations Ordinance was first debated in the Legislative Council late in 1941, European MLC's, fearing the bill would encourage trade

unions, strongly opposed its introduction arguing that it was unnecessary given Fiji's long history of industrial peace, and that such organisations would only become centres of division and dispute (Mayer 1963:68). The government responded, perhaps more frankly than it realised, that since unions were already in existence, the only course was to see that they followed constitutional methods. The Industrial Associations Ordinance has been commonly judged as a positive development for the trade union movement in Fiji, providing as it did for the legal existence of trade unions and protecting them from liability to prosecution for being "in restraint of trade" (Kumar 1974). That it was devised more as a means to contain and control trade unions is, however, clear.

Until 1942 when the two new ordinances came into effect there was no legislation covering either trade unions or the settlement of trade disputes. Under an English Act which then applied to the colonies, unions or industrial associations could be formed but could not be registered. They were therefore not legal bodies (Reay 1951:1). In one sense this left them in an advantageous position in that they were able to exist without being subject to any form of control. Indeed Reay confirmed that prior to the passage of the new law, trade unions did have a 'much freer hand' (Minutes 23/7/41, F36/185). However, in the absence of employer recognition, such status was meaningless. Moreover, in the context of the colonial situation where workers were ignorant of what rights they did have under British law and where the colonial government dealt punitively with those seen as agitators of labour, such theoretical freedom was similarly meaningless. Although the first effective industrial association, the Kisan Sangh or Farmers' Union, had gained recognition from the CSR in 1940 and was negotiating with the company on behalf of growers in May of the following year - that is, before the Ordinance was introduced - it

was only through pressure from the colonial government that the company had conceded recognition of the union. The colonial government had been primarily concerned about the law and order implications of continued company resistance as cane farmers were then in a serious dispute with the company over a proposed new method of calculating the price of cane (Moynagh 1981:161). It had actually threatened that if the company did not recognise the union, it would introduce legislation for compulsory recognition of trade unions and arbitration in the case of unresolved disputes. The company, not wishing to have collective bargaining imposed on it in a way that allowed for outside intervention, conceded, hoping to appease both the growers and the government (Moynagh 1981:161).

The Industrial Associations Ordinance, when it came, however, did not make it mandatory for employers to recognise trade unions. Indeed it was only with the help of pressure or persuasion from the Labour Department that recognition for many workers' unions was won in the next few years. This gave the department a very crucial role and a significant degree of power. The Ordinance was to be the means by which the state would legitimately take action against any trade unions which did not conform to either the model structure or model practices laid down in the ordinance and promoted by the colonial government. Moreover, there is some evidence that the Ordinance was designed to prevent the emergence of large and powerful general unions. The Ordinance might in fact have been enacted sooner than planned to curtail attempts to form such organisations, as will be shown below.

Between 1940 and 1944 at least four attempts to form large general unions foundered or were subverted. The first of these was the Mazdur Sangh (Workers' Union),

formally constituted at a meeting in Wailailai, Lautoka in July 1940 (Hince 1971:370). The Sangh was conceived as a large general union, intended to cover workers in all industries and was the manifestation of an idea which had been around for some time. Indeed, the foundations of the Mazdur Sangh were laid as early as 1938 when, with the help of leaders of the Kisan Sangh, it was tentatively formed with the support of sugar mill workers. In 1944, four years after its formal establishment, the Sangh changed its constitution, confining itself to the sugar industry (as the Chini Mazdur Sangh or Sugar Workers' Union). This course of action was taken to enable it to register under the Ordinance. Earlier attempts to register as a general union had been unsuccessful.

A second attempt to form a general union was made by a builder and contractor named Arthur Groom. Although this union did not materialise, the colonial government's reaction to its proposed formation reveals the intentions behind the Industrial Associations Ordinance which was then being drafted. Groom had written to the Colonial Secretary saying he had been requested by

'quite a number of mechanics to commence and organise a Union to be known as (The Workers Union)'(F36/185 1941).

Aware that the government was about to pass legislation providing for the existence of trade unions he asked if there would be any objection to his 'starting off with one' (Groom to Colonial Secretary 11.7.41 F36/185). Groom's idea was to include both Indian and Fijian labourers but to exclude clerks and salesmen in stores. This was probably intended to exclude the European workers who were predominant in the latter job categories. The idea of forming a single union of both skilled tradesmen, who were

mainly mixed-race, and unskilled labourers, who were mainly Fijian and Indian, was clearly intended to cut across the racially based occupational structure that underlay the colonial economy.²

A second letter from Groom, a month later, reiterated the intention to form a union and the desire to enlist members as soon as possible in order to come into operation by January 1, 1942. Seeking an interview with the Governor, he wrote:

Once we start and call a public meeting and enroll names it will cause quite a stir amongst the workers particularly amongst the Indians (Groom to Colonial Secretary 19.8.41 F36/185).

The Acting Colonial Secretary, Johnson, informed Groom that the action he contemplated was 'premature' as the whole question of trade union legislation was presently under consideration (Johnson to Groom 7.8.41). He was denied an audience with the Governor but invited to make representations to the Government once 'any legislation which the Government eventually decided to introduce is published in the Gazette' (Johnson to Groom 8.9.41 F36/185). Johnson noted that Groom 'had the reputation of being useless and lazy' and was of the opinion that the two letters from him were instigated by someone else and not the outcome of Groom's own energies (Minutes 2.9.41, F36/185). The suggested presence of an Indian agitator behind Groom is implicit. It is Reay's comment on the matter, however, which is most revealing of the colonial government's concerns about such developments and of the intentions of the planned new law. In direct reference to Groom's endeavours, he wrote:

What success these efforts will meet with will remain to be seen but I would point out that the legislation now in draft which, it has been

suggested, will encourage trade unions, is specifically designed to prevent federation. It was South Africa which devised this form of legislation and Mauritius is the only part of the empire to have adopted it. Having got its legislation the Mauritius government hastily organised a number of small trade unions in various industries and districts with the object of defeating the intentions of the Indian Labour Party who wished to weld all workers into one powerful group. Under the legislation, if a union of sugar workers exists in, say, Ba, government could deny any other union the right to include Ba sugar workers in its membership. Until we get this legislation we are powerless to prevent this sort of thing and if a 'One Big Union' gets established before we have that power it will be difficult and perhaps impossible to dislodge it. Safety lies in restricting unions to trades and localities. As things are now, pre-1875 English legislation gives trade unions a much freer hand than is intended under the draft bill (Minutes 23.7.41 F36/185).(Emphasis added)

Reay's minute discloses both the source and the real intention of the new ordinance - to defeat what were considered politically inspired efforts to form large general unions which could be used as political bases, especially by Indian politicians. The carte blanche that colonial administrations had in devising new laws to give formal rights to trade unions in accordance with the policy directive from London, is significant. In the hands of Reay, who, it should be reiterated, was neither an experienced officer of the British Labour Ministry nor an experienced British trade unionist but rather an agent of the colonial government in Fiji, the legislation that had been drafted was designed to be an important tool of control.

Although no more was heard from Arthur Groom, a public meeting was held at the Lilac theatre in Suva in July 1942 to establish a general workers' union, the Workers' Trade Union. Its instigators apparently were a well-known elected Indian Member of the Legislative Council, Vishnu Deo and a storekeeper and political agitator, Sahodar Singh. About 150 people reportedly attended the meeting, but this was far short of expected

numbers and it was thought many might have stayed away from fear. The meeting was also attended by the acting Indian Assistant to the District Commissioner Southern, who filed a report to the Colonial Secretary on what transpired. According to this report, Singh told the meeting that labourers in the colony were not treated as humans and were being 'worked to a standstill'; that in other countries where there were unions wages were much higher and hours of work and conditions were regulated. He called on workers to state their grievances, saying they had nothing to be afraid of and if the Labour Ordinance was brought into force the body they were forming could be registered and their claims recognised (Acting Indian Assistant to DC Southern to Col. Sec. 13.7.42 F36/90).

The meeting formed a body to be known as the Workers' Trade Union and formulated a constitution. Singh was elected president. All of the men elected as office bearers of the union were self-employed or white-collar workers but evidently a majority of the 150 who attended the meeting were labourers. Both Vishnu Deo's and Singh's addresses to the meeting turned on the wages and conditions of labourers and emphasised that workers themselves should be office-bearers of the Union for their own interests (F36/90). The meeting passed a resolution that the Union seek a 7/6 minimum daily wage for unskilled workers. Over the next three months the Workers' Trade Union wrote numerous letters to the colonial government. A file of correspondence between the union and the Colonial Office bears testimony to the union's activity. Amongst the issues it raised were demands for a minimum wage of 7s 6d a day, for a commission to look into the cost of living of all classes in the community and prevailing salaries and wages; and for effect to be given to all ordinances relating to labour and labour organisations without delay to "enable workers to legalise their position and improve their lot". The WTU also

drew to the government's attention other matters such as workers being dismissed without cause from work sites (Singh to Colonial Secretary 21.7.42, 5.8.42, 11.8.42 F36/90).

Reay's relationship with the Union and with Deo was cordial. He replied to each of the Union's letters and acted twice on the matter of dismissed workers, placing them in alternative employment (Reay to Singh 24.8.42). He also saw Deo to explain matters to him and suggested he 'send along his president' as well. Despite this de facto recognition of the Union and the cordiality of relations between Deo and Reay, the emergence of the WTU under Vishnu Deo's leadership was not, in fact, a welcome development. Reay's real feelings were made clear in a Minute he wrote in July 1942. In this he disparaged Deo's past efforts at organising workers in the colony, but added that :

the pinch of rising costs is being felt, particularly by Indians, and this plays into the hands of the men - nearly all non workers - who for their own political ends try to organise the masses. If too much notice is taken by the government of representations like these here it is likely to strengthen the hands of the men we want to keep out of these unions. (Minutes 26/7/42 F36/90)

Written requests from the union to the Colonial Secretary, for representation on all committees government might appoint to deal with matters relating to labour, employment, industrial disputes, conciliation and regulation of wages (21.8.42, 2.10.42, 14.10.42 F36/90), drew a contradictory response from the government. Up until this time the government's war-time committee dealing with labour, the Central Labour Committee, had no representatives of labour on it for the stated reason that "labour was not sufficiently organised to be able to select a representative of workers" (F36/90). Although there was now a general workers' union in existence and seeking to represent labour on this

committee, the government repeatedly told it that the Committee was "not assigned to represent either employers or workers (Minutes 26.7.42 F36/90). The Union was persistent in its demand. By September, a new argument could be used to deny its request and to end correspondence with it. In that month the Industrial Associations Ordinance was gazetted and a few days later it came into force. Its timely enactment enabled the government to inform the union (initially through the Secretary for Indian Affairs) that until it had complied with the law and obtained registration government could neither recognise nor correspond with it as an association representing workers (Minutes 3.11.42; Reay to Singh 8.11.42 F36/90). The union was informed in October that, as then constituted, it could not register. The significance of the legislation as a means of controlling unions is then apparent.

The fact that the Secretary for Indian Affairs communicated the government's response to the union also indicated that the colonial government was treating the union as an organisation of Indians, rather than of workers. While it may well have been a fact that most of the workers involved in the formation of the WTU were Indian, its leaders did not project it as a communal organisation but rather as an all-encompassing union of workers. The colonial government's action in treating it as such was as indicative of its usual tendency to see things racially as it was of its intention to marginalise the organisation. In November 1943, when the union had still not been dissolved in accordance with Section Three (Subsection 5) of the legislation, the Attorney General wrote to its leaders warning that contravention of the legislation was an offence (25.11.43 F36/90).

The case of the WTU demonstrates both the intention and the effectiveness of the new law in terms of limiting trade unions to specific industries and giving the state a high degree of control over them. This did not immediately put a stop to efforts to form one big union. The appearance of a General Labourers' Association, apparently around the time of the WTU's dissolution, giving rise to the suspicion that what had occurred was "in substance a change of name intended to defeat the Ordinance" (Attorney General to Commissioner of Police 5.10.44, 16.10.44 F36/97), drew the attention of the authorities five months later. The Commissioner of Police was directed by the Attorney General to investigate the existence of an organisation called the 'General Labourers' Association' with a view to prosecuting its office bearers for failing to register under Section 14(i) of the Ordinance, which made it an offence to fail to register an industrial association within one month of its formation. Sahodar Singh had, in fact, written to the Attorney General on 29 November 1943 on General Labourers' Association letterhead to say the WTU had been dissolved. Following investigations, the Commissioner of Police informed the Attorney General that although the GLA was proposed as a substitute for the WTU, support had not been forthcoming and it had foundered (Commissioner of Police to AG 1.11.44 F36/97).

Whether the WTU was ever properly advised as to how it should constitute itself in order to register, and whether its leaders would have been prepared to forego the concept of a general union and opt, as the Mazdur Sangh did, to concentrate in one industry instead, is unclear. When Vishnu Deo raised a question in the Legislative Council in May 1944, the government claimed that assistance and advice had been given by the Commissioner of Labour and the Registrar of Industrial Associations to unions in

preparing their constitutions and rules of association for registration and that such advice was always available to those who wished to form labour associations. But it was clear from the WTU episode that Singh and Deo were men the colonial government wanted to keep out of unions. Deo was regarded as an agitator, interested in "organising the masses" for his own political ends. Singh was noted for his outspoken criticism of the colonial government and his sometimes "subversive outbursts" in the vernacular Indian press (Confidential Memo from the Adviser on Native Affairs and DC Southern to Colonial Secretary 31.7.42 F36/90). Neither fitted the colonial government's model of men suitable to lead the sort of labour unions it would encourage over the next decade. That these unions were intended to be responsible organisations led by moderate men is clear. In 1951, Reay wrote proudly:

It is satisfactory to record that, so far, the labour section of the trade union movement (unlike the farmer section) has not got into the hands of politicians. In some unions venality and irresponsibility are to be found but none of the labour unions can be described as militant. Still less is there evidence of communist influence and those employers who once suspected this influence every time a man tried to form a union, no longer allege it. (Reay 2.8.51)

The idea of forming "one big union" did not immediately subside. A weekly workers' newspaper, Mazdur, that began publishing in Hindi in May 1949 printed numerous articles and letters from trade unionists reiterating the desire and need to unite workers and form "one big union" (F62/353). The newspaper, which was translated by the government's Public Relations Officer, L. G. Usher, and carefully monitored for 'communist influence', was aimed at uniting workers. Articles repeatedly called for a single union for Public Works Department Employees and for a "federation of all trade unions in Fiji". As we shall see the federation of labour unions that was eventually formed in 1951 was facilitated by the colonial government and functioned as a co-opted agency.

As for the new law, although it did confer rights and immunities on industrial associations and, in so doing, laid the basis for collective bargaining, it by no means provided for the compulsory recognition of trade unions by employers and was therefore hardly an enabling mechanism for trade unions. Little was gained through this legislation for the union movement. The ordinance was clearly a controlling device, making it mandatory for all industrial associations (whether of employees, employers or farmers) to register under the Ordinance. In order to be able to do so, all associations had to meet certain statutory requirements. Amongst other things, their constitutions had to have provisions for membership qualifications, the conduct of meetings and elections, keeping of accounts and the maintenance of membership lists. Such provisions provided enormous power to the state which had the means of subjecting associations to official inquiries under provisions of the Ordinance. Moreover, associations had to be confined to a particular industry. Although the government justified these restrictive aspects of the legislation as necessary to protect workers' organisations from becoming vehicles for politicians, it is clear that generally the Ordinance did provide the government with the means of closely supervising the affairs of such organisations and of allowing or disallowing unions to exist. The Administrator General was made the Registrar of Industrial Associations, charged with responsibility for seeing that all Associations formed met the requirements of the Act, were registered (or dissolved), and were complying with their constitutions.

The Industrial Disputes (Conciliation and Arbitration) Ordinance, also enacted in 1942, was equally significant. It made provision for conciliation "on conventional lines" and in addition permitted the Governor in Council to require the parties to a dispute to

submit to and be bound by the decision of an arbitration court. Although no arbitration court was appointed under this ordinance until 1951, the provision for compulsory arbitration, which Reay described as "most unusual" and "existing in only one other colony, Mauritius" was, as he explained,

intended for use in a major dispute threatening the economic life of the colony where all other means of settlement have been explored without success. (Reay 1951:1)

In other words, it was intended to provide the government with a means of quickly settling any serious dispute that threatened the interests of European commercial capital, particularly sugar capital. The act was an adjunct to the Industrial Associations Ordinance. While, on the one hand, the colonial government was giving legal rights to trade unions, it was taking the precaution of ensuring that, should any serious dispute between a union and an employer arise, it could be swiftly and compulsorily settled.

Having established the legislation to ensure that unions could be controlled, the department took the next logical step, as the colonial government in Mauritius did, and hastily created a number of trade unions in the main unorganised industries. Its interests in taking this action were primarily to contain labour militancy, actual or potential, within these industries. Where its trade union creations did not produce the desired result, it sought to abandon them and to try alternative institutions.

Organising and Disorganising Workers

The department's activities in creating unions did not commence immediately. Reay took up his appointment. The Public Works Department Employees Union, the first

union formed by the department, was in fact not registered until 1946. The reason was that for the first two years after his appointment to the job, Reay was assigned the task of raising and organising labour gangs for wartime services. It was the labour war effort that opened Reay's eyes to the fact that government needed to take swift action in the areas of promoting unions, establishing a labour advisory board and generally supervising the conditions under which labour was employed in the colonies if it wanted to stay on top of things.

Not only did war bring an unprecedented rise in the cost of living but the nature of the wartime labour demand placed labour, Reay recognised, in a stronger bargaining position vis-a-vis increasing wages. In contrast to an observation he made in 1941 that

The Indian population at the moment is nicely balanced to the requirements of industry and in the Fijian villages is a reservoir of labour available at call but not vitally affected by contractions in demand (Report of the Industrial Relations Officer 1941),

in 1942, Reay commented:

Things are moving quickly in the labour sphere in Fiji and it looks to me as if government's hands will be forced in many directions. (The) condition is changing completely and the amount of work - much of it very urgent - is in excess of the available labour supply. This situation, puts the labourer in a very strong position and it is becoming increasingly the case that labourers are turning the situation to their own advantage and at any time government may find itself seriously embarrassed. (Minute to the Acting Colonial Secretary, 8.6.42 F36/84)

Reay's concern was not that the amount of work was in excess of the available labour since there was, as Reay himself stated in 1941, a reservoir of labour in the

villages.³ It was rather that the large-scale contraction of this reserve army into wage labour threatened to upset the delicate balance the colonial government had always striven to maintain whereby Fijians were primarily occupied in the production of food and other agricultural commodities but available at call for short term demands on their labour. Fijian labourers contracted to work for protracted periods in wartime wage employment might, he feared, continue to stay in the towns and seek continued employment rather than return to the village to resume a subsistence existence. Reay's concern was that the government might then have to contend with the combined force of a Fijian and Indian labouring class.

The first course of action Reay considered necessary was to persuade employers to adopt a common stance on wages, to agree not to compete for their labour requirements and to see the labour situation in a wider social, economic and political context. He had already convened round-table discussions with a number of Suva employers - mercantile firms, contractors, the army, the Public Works Department and aerodrome services. The competition for labour had, Reay said, brought many difficulties and the cost of living had risen to a point where 'unless government takes the initiative, it will probably come from the workers' (Minute 8.6.42 F36/84).

Secondly, Reay was now also convinced of the need for a Labour Advisory Board. He had earlier opposed the concept since "it would have to include unofficial representatives of labour and...this would lead to increased pressure on government for labour reform which government was either not in position to undertake or for other reasons not prepared to undertake" (Minute 8.6.42 F36/84). Now he proposed "a carefully

chosen labour board on which government, employers, Indian, Fijian and possibly half-castes, should be represented" (Minutes 8.6.42 F36/84). The role he envisaged for the Board was to advise government on matters relating to labour, labour conditions, legislation and problems as they arose. The Board, when it came into existence in 1945, was the first tripartite body convened by the government for the ventilation of grievances and for discussion and interaction between employers and workers.

Thirdly, Reay saw an urgent need for more personnel within his department. Labour matters required more than a "one-man department". He felt out of touch with labour matters in Nadi where more than 2000 Fijians were employed by a single employer. He needed, he said, the assistance of a "Fijian and Indian of mature years..." for at least until the end of the war period. These should be men who possessed qualities which would permit him to send them on errands he would not be able to spare the time for - men, moreover, that he could "trust" (Minute 8.6.42 F36/84). Revealing a particular concern about Fijian labour, he wrote:

There is a real need for closer contact with labourers and overseers and with the native authorities whose confidence it is necessary to secure. To explain what I mean about the latter, I refer to those areas in the southern district from which shipping and stevedoring firms recruit their labour. I foresee a strong possibility of trouble with stevedoring labour and it is very necessary that I should become known to the chiefs and Bulis of the districts from which they come. I am having to lean heavily on Ratu Sukuna in this respect and he is not always available. This stevedoring work at the present time is of course of vital importance (Minute 8.6.42 F36/84).

Lastly, Reay saw the organisation of unions in key industries as essential. Priority was to be given to those industries where 'trouble' was expected or already occurring. The colony's largest employers were the government itself, the CSR and the mining company.

Together these three employers accounted for about 75 per cent of the regular wage-earning labour force (Report by the Industrial Relations Officer, 1941 F36/70) and the wage policies of government and the sugar industry tended to influence the whole wage structure of industry in the colony (Labour Department Report 1948). Also significant in terms of the number of workers in its employment - particularly during war-time - was the shipping and stevedoring industry which, though not controlled by a single employer, was dominated by a small number of large firms. As sugar mill workers had already been organised independently under the Chini Mazdur Sangh, it was to its own public works department and to the mining and stevedoring industries that the Labour Department turned its attention in terms of organising unions.

The Public Works Employees Union

The first union the Labour Department formed was the Public Works Employees' Union. Registered in December 1946 and recorded as having a membership of more than 1000 in 1947, it was, according to Reddy (1974) both ineffectual and shortlived and was deregistered and replaced by an independent rival association, the North Western Public Works Employees' Union, four years later in 1950. It seems curious that the PWEU was struck off the register in 1950; it had successfully negotiated a wage increase for its members in 1949 despite the fact that the government was intent on keeping its wage bill down and was rethinking the practice carried over from the war years of making automatic cost-of-living adjustments to wages. From articles in the Mazdur, it appears that the union was being challenged by a rival union in 1949 (F62/353). Whether the colonial government played a role in the formation of the rival, regionally-based PWD union is unknown. However, the Labour Department reported "strained relations" between the

Public Works Employees' Union and the PWD in its 1952 Report and revealed that the PWD considered that the Union represented only a section of PWD workers (ie. unskilled workers). The Department proposed the establishment of an alternative machinery. This did not eventuate but, a year later, an exclusively Fijian union of PWD employees was formed (Labour Commissioner's Report, 1952). The Public Works Fijian Workers Union was registered on 27th November, 1953. While the Labour Department professed concern over the racial exclusivity of the union and the fact that there were two unions in the industry, it nonetheless allowed it to register, thereby tacitly encouraging the splinter union.

The chequered history of the PWD Employees Union appears to have been the result of covert colonial government action vis-a-vis the organisation of workers under its own control. Such action could only have been motivated by the objectives of keeping wages down, workers' leaders in check and labour under control. The North Western Public Works Employees' Union became the Public Employees Union (Hince 1971:3), which continues to exist today.

The Department's concern to organise the stevedoring and mining industries was motivated by a desire to control the frequent unorganised breakdowns in order by Fijian labour in these industries. It is useful at this juncture to consider why the colonial government was so concerned to contain Fijian labour in particular. Firstly, Indo-Fijian labour in the sugar industry (the one industry that Indo-Fijians dominated) was already divided, not only occupationally in terms of growers (farmers) and wage labourers, but also organisationally, with the splintering of growers into several farmers' associations. At

the end of 1947, the year after the first trade union was formed by the labour department, there were seven farmers' unions in existence.⁴

Secondly, since gaining recognition from the Company, the Chini Mazdur Sangh or Fiji Sugar Industry Employees' Association had primarily devoted its energies to annually reviewing working conditions in the industry and negotiating modest annual or biennial wage increases with the CSR. It had posed no problem for the colonial government as it had never so much as called a strike and so had met with the colonial government's approval. Indeed, in 1951 Reay wrote of the 'Sugar Workers' Union':

This is a well led, well organised and well managed union. Since its formation in 1943 it has secured very substantial gains in wages and improvements in the conditions of employment by tough bargaining but has never resorted to direct action...The result is that labour relations existing between the CSR Company and mill workers are excellent. (Reay 1951:2)

In 1955, the CSR and the Union were described in the Labour Department's annual report as "still setting a good example (Labour Department Report 1955).

Thirdly, in the event of trouble in the sugar industry the government could always rely, as it had done in the past, on using Fijian chiefly leaders to draw in Fijian villagers as scab labour to force a settlement and return to work by Indian farmers. In short, Indo-Fijian farmers in the sugar industry were sufficiently divided and the sugar workers' union sufficiently 'tame' to pose little problem for the colonial government. A 'reserve army' of Fijian labour, moreover, provided additional insurance against havoc being wreaked in the economy by organised Indo-Fijian workers in this industry.

By contrast, the mining and stevedoring industries which had, of necessity, drawn exclusively on indigenous Fijians for their labour needs, were not only in a state of continual unrest but also far harder to control. It was common for the colonial government to take a paternalistic, and indeed racist, view of things and to regard the situation as part of 'the Fijian problem' - that is, the problem of the Fijians' 'stage of development'. This attitude belied a deeper concern about Fijian wage workers and their capacity for organising and taking collective action, even in the absence of a trade union. It was with a view to containing uncontrolled or 'wildcat' labour actions that labour unions came to be formed by the colonial government amongst Fijian workers in the stevedoring and mining industries. The department's efforts in organising the stevedoring and mining industries and its attitude to their respective success or failure testifies well to its intentions.

The Fiji Stevedores' Union

The Fiji Stevedores' Union was the second workers' union to be organised by the department, apparently with the assistance of the Adviser on Native Affairs, prominent chief, Ratu Sukuna. This union, which was registered in April 1947, was held up as the department's success story. Its formation was significant in that it followed a major reorganisation of recruitment practices in the industry.

During the war years, Reay had expressed concern about the stevedoring industry which, in order to carry out work vital to the war effort, was raising vast numbers of men from towns and surrounding villages to load and unload ships at the two main ports. In 1942, some 2000 men had been marshalled into a Fijian Labour Corps (also called the

Dock Labour Battalion) and were being maintained at the two ports. Reay had expressed concern at the strong possibility of trouble in the industry. It was true that minor disputes were commonplace on the waterfront. Indeed much of the time of the department's labour inspectors was taken up with sorting out these disputes (Labour Department Report 1943). It was largely to deal with this situation that the department took steps to establish the union. But the union's formation was only initiated after the industry had been reorganised. This reorganisation was significant in terms of the intentions behind it.

In his 1945 report, Reay mentioned he had 'initiated discussions between half a dozen Fijians well known to stevedoring labour' and employers on the matters of new conditions of employment and on forming a union' (Labour Department Report 1945 F36/70). It seems that these discussions resulted in agreement on a proposal by the government for the recruitment of dock labour on a casual basis from villages surrounding Suva and Lautoka. Under the new system, no more than 150 Suva residents would be engaged by the stevedoring companies for dock work. The balance of the industry's labour requirements would be met instead from the 120 or so surrounding villages within a 20-mile radius of the towns. These men were to be recruited through the 'Rokos' or 'Turaga ni Koros' in these areas by employers who were obliged to transport the workers into the towns and accommodate them temporarily in huts made available by the government.

The system was not one which employers favoured. Indeed, later reports of the Labour Department refer to the fact that employers preferred to hire labour from the floating population in the towns and save themselves the costs of transport and

accommodation and often did not observe the arrangement (Labour Department Reports 1950, 1952 in F36/70). Reay at one stage in fact suggested that legislation might be necessary to compel them to do so. He argued that it was in the best interests of employers and of society (and government) in general "to prevent the growth of a large, urban-based casual labour force". The practice of recruiting from the villages surrounding Suva was "ideal" he rationalised, in that it did not disrupt the village way of life, supplied the villagers with income and was cheap for employers, who did not have to maintain a fully paid workforce to meet the occasional calls of ships. It avoided, he argued, "a much higher wage and bad social consequences" (Labour Report, 1950 F36/70).

Reay's concern was not to save employers money, especially since they were not in favour of the scheme and saw transport and accommodation costs as additional burdens. It was rather to limit the growth of an urban Fijian proletariat in Suva and especially to avoid the development of solidarity and cohesion that had occurred amongst Fijian mineworkers. In the context of a shifting or changeable workforce, the establishment of a trade union would serve a primarily symbolic function. Reay was fond of stating that the mass of people in Fiji was "not wage-earning but peasants with an interest in the care of and an attachment to the land" (Labour Department Report 1941). He complained that

‘(this) fact..sometimes escapes the notice of those who advocate policies which have proved beneficial in larger labour communities elsewhere but which may be unsuited to Fiji’. (Labour Report 1943)

The notion of the semi-subsistent casual Fijian worker, more attached to his land than dependent on the wage, also served to justify the low wages paid to Fijian workers.

Thus it was that when the Fiji Stevedores' Union was registered in 1947, it recorded an imprecise membership of "between 1000 and 5000". Although it was technically true that up to the larger number were engaged over a period of time in stevedoring work, at any one time there was no more than 10 per cent of this number engaged at the ports. The union was set up after a school teacher by the name of Isikeli Daveta was recommended to Reay by his 'Fijian Labour Inspector' as a "suitable man for the union" (Reay to Colonial Secretary 29.1.48 F36/161). Although he had had no previous experience of unionism, Daveta turned out to be Reay's "ideal unionist". Under his exemplary leadership, according to Reay, harmonious relations developed between employers and the union and the industry stopped experiencing work stoppages. In 1953, the Department reported that there had been no strikes on the waterfront since the union's formation. Daveta had an office at the wharf and was able to settle any difficulty which arose "quickly and amicably". He replaced labour inspectors as the channel for the settlement of grievances and, as a consequence, workers' wages and conditions of work in the industry "vastly improved" (Labour Department Report 1953).

In the annual reports of the Union, Daveta does appear to have been vigilant in protecting his members' interests. In 1947, for instance, he fought for priority to be given to his members for employment on overseas vessels that docked in Fiji. He called the companies' hiring of unregistered men "promiscuous" and criticised the local firm of Williams & Goslings for its "we can hire anyone we like" attitude (Annual Report, Fiji Stevedore's Union 1947, F36/161). In 1948, the union negotiated for improved conditions and for its members to work in ports in Samoa and Tonga. It reportedly interested itself in matters of concern to the stevedoring companies, such as 'pillage' and 'output at the

wharves' (Reay to Colonial Secretary 29.1.48, F36/161). The union also kept close touch with the Labour Department. Both Reay and a Labour Advisor from Britain, Hollister-Short, were invited to attend its annual general meetings. The union's annual reports, which were always circulated to Reay (who in turn always sent them on to the Colonial Secretary with glowing commendations), also suggest that Daveta was a man of didactic style and conservative wisdom. Typical of his philosophy is this passage from his 1948 report:

Stop, Listen, Think. Beware of outside influences. A strike is a means to an end. There is no benefit (that) can be derived out of such. For example, if you struck and held up a vessel for a number of days, subsequently the freight of the cargo to be discharged here goes up. This will hurt the strikers in the price of those goods. Once the freight goes up automatically the price of goods concerned will go up and the public will suffer for your misbehaviour caused by outside influences. Keep your head. You are doing well (emphasis in original). Don't let outsiders ruin you and the union. The government is waiting to help you provided you go the right way. (Report of the FSU 1948, F36/161).

Reay was always full of praise for Daveta and regarded him as the sole reason for the union's success. He more than once expressed the fear that if Daveta ever left it would "fall into bad hands" or collapse (Reay to Colonial Secretary 6.6.50, F36/161). As he stated in a 1951 report on the trade union movement:

In an industry in which labour relations were previously bad and conditions of labour bad (the union) has produced good relations and vastly improved conditions. These results came from an outstanding union secretary and from the fact that the Labour Department was able to persuade stevedoring employers to accept the principle of collective bargaining where formerly they opposed it. However it is not considered that the Fijian rank and file understand trade unionism and should the present secretary leave the union, it is quite possible that it would collapse or at least become disorganised. (Reay 1951:2)

Labour relations on the waterfront did start to show signs of strain in 1955. In that year stevedoring workers held a one-hour strike. Its immediate cause was the quality and monotony of food served in the workers' canteen. But the department detected general discontent and unrest and dissension in the ranks of the union (Report of the Labour Department 1955). Discontent mainly arose from the practice of allocating work. There is no mention of Daveta but it appears that he had by then left the Union. All that is evident from the department's reports is that a general meeting, called at the suggestion of the new Labour Commissioner, Pearson, elected a new executive and that labour relations reportedly improved soon after.

A new arrangement was also established in that year for allocating work to Suva-based casual stevedores, an arrangement the Union was not party to. It involved a system of issuing permits to Suva casuals to 'ensure regularity of employment to those primarily dependent on stevedoring'. By the end of 1956, few Suva men had applied for permits and the companies had to draw almost entirely on the provinces and districts surrounding the capital. That it was not for want of men in Suva that this occurred is clear. The department's report in that year alluded to the existence of a 'large number of under-employed Suva casuals'. It was, rather, to enforce the long-standing policy of keeping dock labour a temporary or migrant workforce and thereby disorganised and powerless. The Stevedores' Union survived until the sixties, changing its name to the Fiji Dockworkers' Union in 1964. With the demise of the Fiji Seamen's Union at that time, it altered its name and constitution and became, in 1966, the Fiji Dockworkers' and Seamen's Union.

The formation of the Fiji Stevedores Union was, it seems, a fairly successful preemptive act by the Labour Department. The Union's existence and its role in mediating between workers and employers appears to have ensured many years of industrial peace on the waterfront. However, the operation of the system of recruitment of dock labour introduced by the Department cannot be ignored as a vital factor in the explanation of this period of industrial peace. The system of recruitment, which harked back to the migrant system of contract labour operating under the old Native Labour Ordinances, was significant both in forestalling the emergence of a collective proletarian consciousness and worker cohesion amongst Fijian labourers in this industry and in ensuring that no organised action by workers could bring operations to a halt. The deliberate recruitment of labour from a vast 'reserve army' of village labour was perhaps the single most significant reason for the many years of industrial peace in the industry. Not until the seventies would this industry become strike-ridden and the dockworkers union emerge as one of the most militant trade unions.

The Fijian Mineworkers' Union

The third union which the department established was the Fijian Mineworkers' Union. While the Stevedores Union was considered an outstanding success, the Mineworkers' Union was considered a dismal failure by the department. Their leaders were considered a contrast in styles and abilities: the one responsible and effective and an ideal unionist, the other a difficult man with an "intransigent temperament". Efforts to organise the union began late in 1947 and immediately followed a massive three-day strike by mineworkers in December that year. The union was registered in 1948. Like the Stevedores' Union, this union represented an entirely Fijian workforce.

The mining industry, from its beginnings in the mid-1930's, had been the site of numerous strikes and continuous labour unrest. The organisation of labour and the structure of wages at the mines were quite openly racially based, with Fijians occupying the lowest strata in the occupational and wage hierarchy as unskilled surface and underground labour, Part-Europeans and Rotumans occupying the skilled and semi-skilled positions above them and Europeans in managerial and supervisory positions at the top (Bain 1984). As in the organisation of the sugar industry in earlier years, Fijian labourers were housed within the mine compound in congested labourers' barracks with only the most basic facilities. The colonial government, which in the 1940's was still helping the company recruit mining labour, was wont to turn a blind eye to the structural causes of labour unrest, preferring to see it instead as symptomatic of the 'backwardness' of Fijians. Officials in the new Labour Department displayed the same attitude. Reay, for instance, in 1948, denied discrimination in wages existed at the mines, writing that "the three main races, Indians, Fijians and Europeans, compete on an equal footing in the employment market". He defended the existence of better housing for Europeans with the rationale that "such amenities must .. cater for the customs and habits of each community" (Labour Department Report, 1948).

In 1947, the department reported that the mining company had improved amenities at the mine with a view to increasing worker contentment and efficiency. But this did not quiet frequent labour unrest. In November, 1000 workers, mainly Fijian but including many Part-European workers (whom the department chose to believe were intimidated into joining the strike), stopped work at the Tavua minefield over the dismissal of a fellow worker. Although, following conciliation efforts by the department, the man was re-

instated, the workers remained unsatisfied and demanded the dismissal of a senior member of the company's staff together with two of its subordinate officers. When these demands were refused, the striking workers "descended into lawlessness and hooliganism", stoning management houses. The strike was only broken by the intervention of Sukuna and only after he had requested the management to dismiss the two subordinate officers (Labour Department Report 1947).

The Tavua strike was typical of the kind of labour action that Fijian mineworkers staged, both in terms of its immediate, triggering cause - the dismissal of a worker - and in terms of its spontaneity or unorganised nature. The unstructured nature of worker protest and the fact that labour action was most often taken over non-wage issues led Reddy to conclude that the workers were acting less out of dissatisfaction with working conditions and wages and more out of unfamiliarity with the industrial work situation (Reddy 1974:59). Indeed, during the 1947 strike there was apparently no mention of discontent over wages and conditions and workers had in fact assured the Secretary for Fijian Affairs and the Commissioner for Labour that they had no such complaints (Report of the Labour Department 1947). Bain notes, however, that in the aftermath of the strike, a company-appointed Fijian workers' welfare committee heard a wide range of complaints about "overcrowded barracks, unsatisfactory drainage, inadequate washing facilities and the sleeping problems of shift workers" as well as "requests for parity between Fijian and part-European holidays" (Bain 1990). In short, long-held grievances about racially discriminatory terms and conditions lay at the base of mineworkers' industrial action.

The colonial government had long been concerned about the labour situation at the mines where it seemed workers were given to downing tools at the least provocation and where, during such times, leaders appeared spontaneously from among the rank and file to take command. Prior to the establishment of the Fijian Mineworkers' Union, a Provincial Committee of traditional leaders had been set up primarily as a buffer body between workers and management at the mines. This committee consisted of a traditional leader from each province from which mining labour was drawn and functioned as a "tenuous link between management and workers" (Hince 1971:374), mediating in the relations between the company and its workers. The 1947 strike threw up a new leader and it was proposed that a new committee be established and constituted as a trade union. Before the year was out, the Labour Department had drafted a constitution and rules for the union for submission to a general meeting of mineworkers. It had also persuaded the mine management to recognise the union.

The arrival of the union did not, however, bring about industrial peace at the minefield. Strikes continued to occur spontaneously in response to any highhanded or provocative actions by the company or its personnel and continued to throw up 'leaders' other than those in the union. The Labour Department was quick to scorn the union, once it became obvious that it was ineffective, and to deprecate or disparage the wanton behaviour of the Fijian workers. A strike at the mine by 150 underground workers and 125 open-cut miners in 1951 was described by Reay as a "typical Fijian reaction to a mistake over rations and once more it demonstrated the inability of the Fijian Mineworkers' Union to control its members" (Labour Department Report 1951). The

union was often found disclaiming responsibility for strikes but was powerless to prevent them happening (Labour Department Report, 1952).

Part of the reason the mineworkers' union was ineffective had to do with the expectations of the role it was to play. Created externally and as a device basically to contain labour militancy at the mines by providing a channel for grievance settlement, it at first strove to work against workers' impulses rather than with them. For this reason, and for the reason too that it was a creation of the colonial government, it failed to win workers' trust and support. But the union had a second problem in that the Provincial Committee continued to exist after the union was established, making matters confusing for workers and difficult for the union.

The union felt the company was in fact deliberately retaining the Provincial Committee to minimise its influence (Labour Department Report 1952), an allegation which was supported by the fact that in the 1952 mine strike the company chose to negotiate with the workers not through the union, but through the Committee. The Labour Department also noted that the Committee's continued existence was a "sore point" with the Union which regard(ed) the Committee's retention by Management "as a device...to minimise the influence of the Union" (Labour Report, 1952). Company recognition of the Union as the sole body for industrial relations and collective bargaining only came about after the Union asserted itself and threatened to call a second strike in that year to enforce demands for increased wages and an end to food rations for mining labour.⁵ The dispute was referred to a conciliation board appointed under the Industrial Disputes (Conciliation and Arbitration) Ordinance for settlement. Although the ration system was retained, the

union won an increase of 6d. a day for mineworkers. This was the first occasion on which the government instituted a formal machinery under the 1942 Ordinance to attempt to settle a dispute. Employers would increasingly demonstrate a preference for government involvement in dispute settlement.

Although the Labour Department argued that the union would have had nothing to fear from the Provincial Committee if its leaders had had the full confidence of the workers, it was clearly an anomalous arrangement to have two competing bodies existing side by side. But the colonial government clearly did not accept any responsibility for the situation. Instead it used the situation to argue that indigenous Fijians were not only unaccustomed to the rigours of industrial work but unable as yet to comprehend the concept and principles of trade unionism. In 1949, Reay wrote:

It is doubtful whether the (Fijian) worker understands or can be made to understand at this stage of Fijian development, the principles of trade unionism. (Report of the Commissioner of Labour 1949)

In 1952, the year before he retired, he added:

The Fijian is not ready for trade unionism as the term is understood elsewhere and it may take a generation to make a trade unionist out of him. (Report of the Labour Commissioner 1952)

He went on to suggest that perhaps another form of organisation, one "approaching the traditional concept of Fijian organisation, might achieve better results". The militancy of Vatukoula mineworkers led in fact to serious debate about whether the trade union was a suitable institution for Fijians, whether it should be made to conform more with

traditional' Fijian institutions and whether Fijian chiefs should lead unions.⁶ It also gave rise to theories about proletarianised Fijians. Governor Ronald Garvey, reporting on a major strike by mineworkers in 1955 to the Colonial Office, remarked:

It is to be remembered that at Vatukoula, a second generation of Fijians is growing up who have never known anything but the environment of the mines. The life of the village with its communal obligations and social sanctions is little known to them and there is a tendency for them to develop into rather belligerent individuals with a disregard for authority. Coupled with this is the fact that the Secretary of the Mineworkers Union, Basilio Mate, is himself of an intransigent temperament. Nor can management of Vatukoula escape criticism for they at times are capable of displaying an unrealistic attitude. (Governor's Despatch No. 499 21/9/56, F36/70-7)

It is important to note that by this time, indeed following the 1952 strike, the union did command leadership of the mineworkers and was taking action to improve the workers' wages in-hand. It continued to be maligned by the department, however, probably for the reason that it failed to play the role expected of it. Following the 10-day miners' strike which the union led in 1955, Commissioner of Labour Pearson wrote:

I am afraid that the position at Vatukoula will remain uneasy for a long time possibly until the great majority of Fijians at Vatukoula adapt their ways to an urban industrial environment and freely accept and work with other races...[w]hile certain of the blame for the failure to establish satisfactory industrial relations lies with the mines management and the union secretary, it is probable that an important reason for the failure stems from the inability of Fijians to conduct industrial negotiations and from the fact that Fijians are not activated by economic ideas in the same way as Westerners and Easterners. (Minutes 1956, F36/65)

The colonial government here was erecting an ideological smokescreen to obscure the reality of social relations between labour and capital at the mines. Portraying the ongoing conflict as a problem of 'the Fijian' raised outside the controlling obligations and

sanctions of the village not only denied the class basis of action by ethnic Fijian workers, but also absolved capital and the colonial government from any responsibility for the situation. It worked both to reinforce the orthodoxy of working through 'traditional' hierarchies to govern and control Fijians and to justify seeking alternatives to unions. Such alternatives to unions, sought in the name of finding institutions more appropriate for Fijians, were intended to disorganise Fijian workers within the most troublesome industries and to prevent the spread of labour militancy. Before considering these, it is important to discuss another significant initiative in organising trade unions that the Labour Department made in this period. This involved the formation of the first umbrella organisation of trade unions, the Fiji Industrial Workers' congress. This organisation was central to the colonial state's strategy of co-opting organised labour as we shall see.

The Fiji Industrial Workers' Congress

The FIWC owed its existence to the colonial government. Its formation immediately followed a meeting between the Minister of State for the Colonies who visited Fiji in 1951 and representatives of a number of unions who had been invited to meet him. The FIWC's formation was thus directly sponsored by the colonial government. The reason why the colonial government, which was so opposed to federations of labour, should act in such a supportive way to form a federation had again to do with preempting the autonomous emergence of such a federation. Certainly the colonial government was aware of tentative plans to form a federation of labour unions from its close monitoring of the Hindi workers' newspaper, Mazdur.⁷ Led by Pandit Ami Chandra (founder of the Chini Mazdur Sangh), the representatives of the CMS, the Fijian Mineworkers' Union,

the Fiji Airport Employees Union and the Fiji Public Works Department Employees Union, signed a document which included the following statement:

We the representatives of the various unions assembled here today agree to form a Federation of Unions with the object of promoting and safeguarding the interests of the working class generally (cited in Sutherland 1984:199).

Thus was the FIWC, modelled on the British Trade Union Council, formed. While its formation did, in some respects, represent 'a milestone in the history of the trade union movement' (Sutherland 1984:199), its moderate position and close association with the colonial (and later post-colonial) state and the power and legitimacy it derived from this, marked it from the beginning as a potential tool of the state. Two years after its establishment, the FIWC's leaders met with the Governor and, in response to a proposal made by him, agreed to participate in 'annual meetings (with) government officers'. B.D. Lakshman, who assumed the presidency of FIWC following the death of Ami Chandra in 1953,⁵ kept the Commissioner of Labour closely informed of "labour problems in progress or latent". Within the FIWC, radical or militant tendencies were usually eradicated. Although, some leaders of the FIWC at times acted militantly (as Lakshman did in the late fifties), they did so in pursuit of personal political goals. Genuine militants had little recourse other than to mobilise support outside of the ambit of the FIWC and with a view to countering or challenging its control of the labour movement. We turn now to consider the Labour Department's efforts to develop alternatives to unions.

Developing Alternatives to Unions

Whereas in 1950 the Labour Commissioner waxed lyrical about the success of collective bargaining,

it has probably saved the country much unrest and has confounded pessimists who forecast dire consequences arising out of our trade union policy. (Minute, Labour Commissioner's Report File, F36/70),

by 1955 the colonial government was concerned about a spreading labour militancy and recourse to strike action. The Labour Commissioner indeed commented in his 1955 report that although the Vatukoula strike that year had not given workers more than they would have received had they gone to arbitration and remained at work, it nonetheless might have given other unions the desire to strike that year. Certainly, the 1955 mining strike demonstrated incipient militancy amongst organised labour and the undeniable beginnings of cross-ethnic and anti-capital worker unity. In short, it demonstrated worker solidarity and militancy, both of which the colonial government was concerned to deny and subvert.

Constructing racial ideologies and projecting different categories of labour as representative of this or that 'racial group' was a principal means by which worker militancy was denied. Such racial ideologies, evident in the colonial records and in Labour Department reports, projected Fijian workers as errant and undisciplined, backward and easily-led - essentially needing the controlling, disciplining reins of an authoritarian 'traditional' leadership, to conform with an idealised image as respectful and loyal natives, without which they displayed a disregard for authority and an intemperate belligerency. Fijian labour militancy was thus seen as arising from the problem of the (commoner) Fijians' 'stage of development'. On the other hand, Indians were projected as avaricious, manipulative and devious and stamped with a bitterness - the legacy of indenture - which conditioned their attitude and explained their hostility to the British.

Developing alternatives to unions was a strategy used by the colonial government to control labour militancy from the mid-1950s. As early as 1954, the Labour Commissioner reported on the introduction of what he called a "new device for smoothing industrial relations" at Namaka Airport in Nadi. The device was a Works Committee or council made up of representatives of workers and employers in the industry. It was, he said, "working well, to the chagrin of the union" which had apparently opposed its establishment because it "detracted from (its own) power and prestige." Why would the Labour Department have wanted to set up an alternative body in an industry where there already existed a trade union? Why would it have wanted, in other words, to diminish an established union's power and prestige? The answer seems to lie quite simply in a concern to erode the power and base of unions which it (and the colonial government generally) did not favour. This evidently was the case where the Fiji Airport Employees' Union was concerned.⁹

A Works Committee had also earlier been proposed by the Labour Department in 1952 for each main centre of the Public Works Department, following the development of "strained relations" between the Department and the PWD Employees Union (Report of the Commissioner of Labour, 1952). The Labour Commissioner's Report for 1952 said that the Union Secretary was very active in the interests of its members but some employing officers "resented his attitude and approach and considered some of his demands unreasonable". This was reason enough, it seems, to consider an alternative to the union. The proposal was dropped, however, after the union insisted that it appoint the workers' representatives to each works committee. This the PWD objected to (Labour Department Report 1952).

In proposing works committees and other alternative machinery, the colonial government often claimed to be trying to develop an institution more suitable to the needs of Fijians. On the basis of the Namaka experiment, the Colonial Secretary suggested that works committees might better suit Fijians than a union and proposed its application at Vatukoula. Although this did not eventuate something very similar, which was simply called a "joint machinery", was introduced in 1956 following the recommendations of a Mr Barltrop, a visiting labour advisor from Britain. The company appointed a welfare officer and it was under his direction that this new machinery was set up. That this was in essence a resuscitation of the Provincial Committee seems obvious. Indeed it was described as such by the Governor who added that care would be taken to see that it did not deal with wage matters which were the union's affair. The union's longtime secretary, Mate, died in this year, and was replaced by a former Methodist minister with "little knowledge of unionism", although he had apparently participated in the 1947 strike. It was with the cooperation of the new leadership of the union that the department negotiated the setting up of the new consultative machinery.

Works committees were proposed by the Labour Department for other establishments, ostensibly "for those workers who were unorganised". In his 1953 report, the Commissioner of Labour stated that although opposition to such committees had originally come from employers, trade unions were now saying they would resist them unless they were permitted to nominate all worker representatives. These committees were evidently being established in industries where unions had already formed and clearly their purpose was to weaken or subvert the unions. That the unions were aware of

this is indicated by their attempts to retain control of the machinery by insisting they nominate worker representatives.

Another institution debated in this period and later legislated for, was Wages Councils. The concept of Wages Councils had first been raised in the early 1950's by the Labour Advisory Board which recommended that regulations be made under Section 20 of the 1947 Labour Ordinance for the appointment of Boards to determine minimum rates of pay within particular industries. Separate legislation seems to have been preferred to the unwieldy mechanism provided under the 1947 Act (Commissioner of Labour to the Colonial Secretary, 16.12.55, CSO F36/200 Enclosure 3). On 10 December, 1954, the subject had also been raised by a Fijian member of the Legislative Council during discussion of the Appropriation Bill of 1954. The concern of the council member was quite plainly to establish an alternative to trade unions for Fijians. The member claimed he had been approached several times by Fijian labourers working in Suva about the inadequacy of their wages. But he argued against trade unions for Fijians:

trade unionism seemed to cut across the grain with the Fijian labourer or the ordinary Fijian. It is quite alien to him to form a body to oppose his own employer. He is the product of a patriarchal society, his employer is a father. How can he be expected to go fully into the arts of trade unionism which combine against the people who are employing him? I therefore plead that government should find a means of having a wages council or some means whereby employers and employees could sit and discuss wages and problems that are common to industry. (Extract from Address of Fourth Native Member of Leg. Co., 10.12.54, CSO F36/200; encl. 1)

The new Commissioner of Labour, Pearson, said in response that he would pursue the matter with employers and union representatives. He added that wages councils had been very successful in the United Kingdom in those industries where there was a lack of

organisation on one side or the other. And he pointed out that they were usually temporary institutions which declined once "industries learned to manage their own affairs and both sides learned to conduct themselves without the need for such machinery". Eight months later, at an administrative officers' conference held at Government House, Pearson would echo the sentiments of the Fijian Legislative Council member that Fijians did not understand trade unionism, even while they appeared to be strongly attracted to it (F36/199).¹⁰

In December 1955, Pearson sent the Colonial Secretary a copy of a draft Wages Council Bill for approval. In a covering note he said that, should the bill be passed, he had no intention of rushing in and recommending the actual establishment of wages councils, but such councils would be desirable for shop assistants, tailors and garment workers, commercial workers, and building and construction workers. He reiterated that wages councils were a temporary institution to cover a phase in the development of collective bargaining systems. The councils would be

continuing bodies with the purpose of permanently regulating the minimum wages of an industry until such time as it was superseded by collective bargaining. (Commissioner of Labour to the Colonial Secretary, 16.12.55, CSO F36/200, encl. 3).

Under the proposed legislation awards made by wages councils would amend existing labour contracts and be enforceable at civil law, an officer appointed under the ordinance would have the power to inquire into and sue in respect of breaches, and any breaches by employers of wages regulations, on summary conviction, would carry liability to a fine not exceeding 20 pounds for each offence.

The bill was gazetted in November 1956. Employers in the colony were at first united in their opposition to it. The Suva Chamber of Commerce registered "strong concern" at the proposed legislation saying it was unnecessary, as the existing law was "adequate and suitable for the needs of the colony in the adjustment of wages" (CSO F36/200). The Chamber said it knew of no instance where wage negotiations had failed through shortcomings in the present provisions and added that legislation of this nature might upset "the present amicable relations between employers and employees organisations". It also argued, rather perceptively, that the bill could "weaken the position of the Union by apparently offering an alternative method of wage bargaining to the employee" and that it was liable to be discriminatory in its application in that it was

only likely to be effective against the larger employers who are already, perhaps, the most conscientious followers of negotiated labour union settlements. We cannot see how this bill could be effective or enforced amongst the very large number of small employers in the colony. (CSO F36/200)

While the Chamber's arguments, particularly in respect of the bill's enforceability amongst smaller employers, may have appeared valid - indeed 30 years later the matter of enforceability remains a problem where smaller firms are concerned - the main concern of its members in opposing the bill was to prevent wages councils being established in the larger commercial firms, including wholesale and retail enterprises and building and construction firms. These were still unorganised and were indeed the very industries that were targeted for wages council coverage. Yet, only five years later, the Wages Council came to be seen as the lesser evil and little resistance was raised against the establishment of the first such council. By then, in contrast with the situation prevailing in 1956, a large general workers' union covering the wholesale and retail sector had been formed and had

led a major strike.

For their part, and despite the implications of the bill, the trade unions affiliated to the FIWC supported the idea of Wages Councils in principle. Their reason for doing so was mainly that although the trade union movement was growing, its strength was confined to particular industries only and it needed the colonial state's assistance to raise the wages of workers in unorganised industries. As Pearson's minute to the Colonial Secretary on the subject of the Chamber's letter noted,

The Chamber is not wholly honest. Few commercial employers negotiate with a union. If a Union does not exist then there should be other machinery (Minute, Commissioner of Labour to Colonial Secretary, 29.11.56, CSO F36/200).

On 29 April, 1957 on the eve of the bill's second reading in the Legislative Council, more opposition to the bill was expressed, this time from building firms in the process of registering as the Master Builders' Association:

We look with considerable alarm at the suggestions made in the draft bill which is now before government and feel that no good purpose could be served by depriving the employer of the right to decide the worth of an employee (CSO F36/200).

The MBA argued that the relations between employers and employees in the colony were on the whole most cordial and said,

we regret that any move should be made to introduce machinery which will enable the disgruntled few to apply for interference in their relation to their employers. In short, sir, we can see no reason whatever in the establishment of a Wages Council as proposed and sincerely hope that this matter will be dropped (CSO F36/200).

Despite employer opposition the bill was debated and passed by the Council later that year without a dissenting vote and became law. The Act, however, would not come into effect until the Governor in Council appointed wages councils by notice in the gazette. While the principle of being able to fix minimum wages by law was not new - provision was made under the 1947 legislation although no regulations had ever been made - now the machinery for doing this existed.

By 1959, no wages councils had as yet been established although the annual reports of the Labour Commissioner often made references to work conditions and wages in a number of unorganised industries. In April of that year, Mohammed Ramzan and C.P. Bidesi, representing the FIWC, presented a memorandum to the Governor asking for a Wages Council to be established to fix minimum wages for "unprotected workers" who were not as yet organised in trade unions. In particular, they mentioned workers in the catering and retailing trades and in transport services. In reply to a question from the Governor, Ramzan made it clear that he "did not want wages councils (established) where workers were organised, but only where they were unorganised, such as shop assistants and bus drivers" (F36/200).

Not until 1961 was the first Wages Council established. That this first council was formed to cover workers in the wholesale and retail trade, and at that particular time, suggests that it came as part of the reaction to the 1959 strike for which the Wholesale and Retail Workers General Union was responsible, and was intended to disempower the union. The fact that this first wages council received the support of the Fiji Industrial Workers' Congress speaks volumes for the state's strategy of cooption, using a federation

of trade unions of its own creation. The FIWC was to play a crucial role in the next decade, a role which, in its later incarnation as the Fiji Trades Union Congress (FTUC), would culminate in its voluntary incorporation in tripartite arrangements devised by the post-colonial state.

Endnotes

1. Luke's despatch to the Secretary of State in 1941, for instance, pointed out that, although draft bills amending the Masters and Servants Ordinance and the Fijian Labour Ordinance had been prepared some time ago, their introduction to Legislative Council had been deferred for the reason that the copra industry, which would mainly be affected by the modifications, was experiencing a "crisis" at the time and it was therefore not considered an opportune time for drastically changing the law. Governor Luke suggested that it would be preferable to "await the time when a thorough overhaul of the Labour Ordinances becomes possible" than to carry out any further amendments to the existing laws (Despatch No 52 19.4.41 F36/32). Even Reay in 1940 argued for the retention of contract labour in the copra industry on the grounds that the cost of recruiting "required that employers should be protected". Though he recognised the 'evils inherent in the contract system', he maintained that "the majority of employers adopt a sensible attitude and those that don't, make a rod for their own backs" (Report of Industrial Relations in Fiji 1941). The fact that some employers had abused the penal provisions of the laws that very year, making it necessary for the government to intervene and cancel a number of contracts, was not, apparently, a matter of import to Reay (F36/70).
2. Not only did the 'protectionist' Fijian labour policy, the Indian indentured labour system, and, later, the recruitment of dock-labourers during the war years from Fijian villagers leave their legacies in an Indo-Fijian dominated sugar industry and Fijian-dominated mining and stevedoring industries; within these and most other industries, as well as in government departments, there was a distinctive racially-based occupational hierarchy: Europeans occupied management positions, Part-Europeans dominated skilled occupations (trades) and Fijians and Indians predominated amongst the unskilled workers.
3. Indeed this reserve was being drawn upon for the war effort. Several thousand labourers were employed as a civilian force on military works during the war years while a further 2000 Fijians formed a standing military force.
4. The two largest, the Kisan Sangh (Farmers' Association) and the Akhil Fiji Krishik Maha Sangh (All Fiji Farmers' Union), represented not so much ethnic and religious differences between the growers as manipulation of communal rivalries by leaders of the latter organisation whose concern was to protect the interests of Gujarati traders. The Kisan Sangh threatened their interests by its efforts to form cooperative stores to provide farmers with cheaper essential store goods (Moynagh 1981:164; Sutherland 1984:). Moynagh points out that to some extent the unions were also agents of competition between the CSR and Indian businessmen for a larger share of the income from cane (Moynagh 1981:164). The company, though seemingly favouring the Kisan Sangh as the more moderate union, was not averse to the Maha Sangh's existence. Divided growers posed less of a problem to it than a united growers' movement and it was fearful of the Kisan Sangh becoming too strong. This fear was doubtlessly at the base of the company's refusal to meet the Kisan Sangh's request for a loan to establish a Cooperative Store.

5. The cost of rations to employers was always regarded as a portion of the wage and companies which provided such rations, usually from their own stores, for which they purchased goods in bulk, were usually opposed to abolishing the ration system which would mean paying workers a full cash wage. This was the position of the mining company. The company's argument that it was in the workers' own interests to receive part of their wages in the form of rations was laced with racist paternalism. As paraphrased by the Commissioner of Labour the argument was that "The feckless Fijian is inclined to spend his wages as soon as he received them and the employers believe that most of the labour would not be able to feed themselves and their family for a month" (Report of the Commissioner of Labour 1952).
6. See, for instance, the Extracts from the Minutes of the Administrators' Conference held at Government House from 3-5 August 1955, (F36/99).
7. Formed in 1949, the newspaper announced in one of its early issues, both a move to form one union of PWD workers and an intention to form a 'Federation of Trade Unions'. Indeed, the theme of a federation of labour unions was a recurrent one in the *Mazdur*. The newspaper was closely watched by the colonial government, most of its articles being translated for effective monitoring.
8. The Despatch from the Governor to the Secretary of State on July 8, 1955 paid tribute to Ami Chandra, saying "His steadying influence and considerable ability will be missed, both in the Congress and by Government" (Despatch No 341 F36/70-75).
9. This union was established in 1951 by a former MLC B.D. Lakshman, whose earlier power base in the Kisan Sangh had been destroyed by the fragmentation of the farmers' union movement, leading to his electoral defeat. Lakshman sought and eventually secured an alternative power base in the labour movement in the 1950's.
10. Pearson also asked at that meeting whether this represented Fijians' desire to "get away from village life" and whether traditional leaders should take a greater part in the trade union movement or whether the leadership of the movement should have "fresh minds not bound up in traditional ways". Amongst those who replied to Pearson were Ratu Kamisese Mara, who rejected the first suggestion and said Fijian interest in trade unions stemmed from them "losing faith in government and needing to form themselves into some sort of mutually-supporting body", and Ratu Sukuna, Secretary for Fijian Affairs, who proffered the view that it was an "awakening desire to compete with other races" that caused Fijians to learn about trade unions (Minutes of the Administrative Officers' Conference op.cit. August 3-5, 1955, F36/199). Both Fijian chiefs failed to see the factor of Fijians developing a consciousness of themselves as workers as significant in the development of unions amongst Fijians.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RISE AND FALL OF MILITANT ALTERNATIVES (1957 - 1969)

Labour must be treated as an equal partner in industry, in no way inferior.
We need capital to come in, but it is unfair to let it come in to exploit the
people of this country.

Jim Anthony, strike leader, in a public address,

December 16 1959.

Introduction

The December 1959 strike by the Wholesale and Retail Workers' General Union (W&RWGU) and the associated riots that occurred in Suva, sent disturbing shockwaves through the colony. The strike, which saw the town placed under curfew and police and army reserves called up, holds an unrivalled place in Fiji labour history for the serious challenge that it presented to both capital and the colonial state. That the challenge was posed by organised labour, and that amongst the premises singled out for violence and "practically wrecked" were the offices of the Labour Department, might seem ironical given the colonial government's fostering of labour unions. Yet, as the previous chapter shows, such unions as were nurtured or encouraged were those that accorded with the colonial government's notion of responsible unionism.

The challenge presented by the young militant leaders of the W&RWGU in 1959 marked a departure from the moderate, "responsible" unionism of the 1940's and early 1950's. Significantly it represented a challenge from organised labour united across the two main ethnic categories and the main targets of the violent rioting that accompanied the strikes were undeniably shops and business premises representing foreign capital. The strike also incited general hostility towards the colonial government, which was seen as

siding with capital. The young militant leaders of the W&RWGU could hardly be dismissively disparaged as politicians exploiting the union movement for their own political ends. They were clearly genuine labour leaders, bent on improving the lot of workers in the colony and unafraid to take direct action. As such, they had to be thwarted.

The militancy that they personified did not become manifest overnight. Indeed it began to be seen in 1957 with the serious industrial tensions that overtook the hitherto unproblematic milling operations of the sugar industry, when workers aligned across racial/occupational boundaries to demand better wages and conditions and an end to the iniquitous colonial occupational hierarchy based on 'race'. The denial of sugar labour militancy, implicit in the colonial government's reduction of the problem to a matter of unwelcome external elements taking control of the mill workers' union, was contradicted by its actual responses. The introduction of a new industrial disputes ordinance and, later, the amendment of the Industrial Associations' Ordinance and the enactment of a special constraining law for the sugar industry, indicated the seriousness with which the colonial administration viewed this incipient challenge by militants.

From 1957 to 1969 we saw the rise and fall of militant alternatives in the labour movement. That the colonial state had much to do with the erosion of these militant alternatives is clear from the ideological, legislative and institutional means of containment introduced and/or employed in this period. I focus in this chapter on three unions (and their leaders) whose militant activities resulted in both the introduction and use of further, overt controls - particularly legislative controls - and in the pursuit of other, more subversive controlling strategies by the colonial government. The latter strategies included

encouraging the revival or formation of 'moderate' unions and sponsoring ethnically-exclusive breakaway unions; establishing wages councils (with the FIWC's help) to cover organised sectors controlled by militant unions; and introducing joint consultative machineries through which favoured union leaders could be coopted and non-favoured leaders marginalised. The formation of the Fiji Employers Consultative Association (FECA) and the state-aligned FIWC's survival (with the state's help) after a serious challenge by an alternative, militant, federation of labour unions are significant developments in this period.

The Emergence of Sugar Labour Militancy

Reddy (1974:111) indicates that 1957 held the highest pre-independence record for numbers of man-days lost through strike action by organised labour. In that year, three strikes, involving 4,922 workers, cost the colony 20,825 man-days. This was almost double the total man-days lost in 1955 (10,457) and the figure remained unsurpassed until the early 1970's when a massive upsurge in strike activity and a revival of labour militancy reduced it to a trifling statistic.¹ The main contributing factor to the 1957 loss was a series of three strikes - two of them 'unofficial' in that they were not sanctioned by the union - in the sugar industry in July, October and December of that year by mill workers affiliated to the Chini Mazdur Sangh or Fiji Sugar Industry Employees Association (FSIEA). The first two strikes uncovered a challenge by more militant aspirants to the moderate leadership of the union. Both the colonial government's attempted subversion of this challenge and, after militants assumed leadership of the union, its legislation against sugar workers' right to strike were strategies designed to nip sugar labour militancy in the bud.

The Strikes of 1957

The FSIEA had long held the reputation for being a responsible union. Since its formation in 1944, the union had been under the leadership of its founders, Pandit Ami Chandra and Nand Kishore. After Chandra died in a plane crash in 1953 while travelling to attend a British Council funded trade union training course, Kishore assumed the Presidency. Both Chandra and Kishore were moderate men and the signing of wage agreements for each crushing season at annual conferences between the company and the union, which had become standard practice since 1947, was instituted by them (LCP 3 of 1958:2). In 1957, however, the amicable relations the union enjoyed with the company, sustained by the union's moderate leadership, were suddenly soured.

Militants in the union's executive, taking advantage of Kishore's absence from Fiji on a six month training programme, decided to press for a much higher wage -of 2s 6d an hour- and for a system of job evaluation for those receiving a higher wage (LCP 26 of 1959:8). The union also became involved in efforts to extend its membership by recruiting skilled workers employed by the company on what was called its 'Mechanics List'. These three issues - wages, job evaluation and representation - lay at the base of the industrial troubles of 1957. The latter two signified both a challenge to the company's racially-based occupational and wage structure and a move to form a single union of sugar industry workers and for both these reasons they were vehemently opposed by the company.

As explained in the report of the Sugar Board of Inquiry of 1959 (hereafter called the Honeyman Commission), it had been the Company's practice to

'divide its manual workers for the purpose of pay scales into two distinct occupational groups. The first and smaller group consists of its artisan workers and tradesmen who were and are paid on scales known as the 'Mechanics List'. The second and larger group were the other manual workers - unskilled and semi-skilled - who are usually described as mill and field workers or simply labourers and are paid on scales known as the Labourers' List' (LCP 26 of 1959:2).

This division of manual workers on the basis of skill had a further, racially-based organising principle. Mechanics list employees, who originally had comprised an exclusively European occupational class, now predominantly comprised Part-Europeans (82 %) and Chinese (6%) who formed minority ethnic categories in the colony. Fijians and Indians made up the remaining 12 % and were thus disproportionately represented in this occupational category. Mechanics list employees numbered 327 and generally enjoyed better wages and conditions than those employed on the labourers' list who represented the 2,400 lower-paid workers in the industry, and comprised mainly, but not exclusively, Indian wage employees of the company. A not insignificant number of Fijians were also employed on the labourers' list.

The racially-based occupational structure, typical of colonial economies, was both a source of friction amongst workers and a means therefore by which they were kept divided on the basis of 'race'.² Indeed the occupational structure had given rise to a second union for sugar mill workers, the Fiji Sugar Skilled Workers Union registered in 1951, under the exclusive control of 'Part-Europeans', who dominated the mechanics list (being clearly preferentially engaged as tradesmen trainees by the company) and evidently sought to protect their monopoly of skilled jobs via this union.³ The fact that some labourers' list workers were doing mechanics jobs⁴ underlay the racist basis of this occupational arrangement and was both a major source of resentment and the reason the

FSIEA now called for job evaluation at the mills. Under the circumstances, it is significant that the FSIEA was assisted in its endeavours to recruit mechanics list employees by two of the company's workers in this category -Lui Ting (described as Fijian-Chinese) and John O'Neill (a 'Part-European'), who held the positions of motor mechanic and blacksmith, respectively. The two men, and other Part-Europeans who were clearly employed on the company's mechanics' list, were to play a prominent part in the new militancy that emerged within the FSIEA from 1957 to 1959.

In fact, the representation issue divided Part-European sugar workers, thereby undermining the design of the occupational structure - to keep workers racially divided.⁵ The company apparently involved itself in a covert effort to subvert the FSIEA's intentions by encouraging the revival of the Fiji Sugar Skilled Workers' Union (FSSWU) which had long been moribund,⁶ an effort which the colonial government appears to have aided. In March the Registrar General wrote to the defunct union giving it three months to show cause why its registration should not be cancelled. This clearly informed the inactive officers of the union that, technically, their union was still in existence and that indeed they were still recognised as the office-bearers. It doubtlessly encouraged their revival of the organisation later that month.

Despite the revival meeting, the FSIEA, a week later at a general meeting in Lautoka, reaffirmed that it was 'legally ... competent to represent every member of the union including skilled workers..' and resolved that if the company was not prepared to negotiate the union's demands the union would 'use all legal rights including a strike if necessary'. The struggle between the two unions for members amongst Mechanics list

employees continued over the next two years. The Honeyman Commission's finding two years later (in July 1959) that the Fiji Sugar Trademen's Union (as the FSSWU renamed itself in 1958) represented 'a substantial majority of employees on the mechanics' list' (no figures were given to support this) and its satisfaction that the union, since its revival had been 'an effective body' seems to be contradicted by the fact that only two years later the union was listed as having fewer than 50 members in the Labour Department's annual report.⁷

It was the wage issue which precipitated the first strike in 1957. Officials of the FSIEA had precipitately agreed to a wage increase of 2s 6d a week for the 1957 crushing season, which was far short of the original claim for 2s 6d an hour. Militants, supported by 'the bulk of workers' reacted almost instantaneously - within 24 hours of the signing of the agreement, "a gang of 12 or 15 Fijians (began) driving employees away from the running machines at the Lautoka mill" (LCP 3;1958;2). The strike was thus as much a challenge to the union leaders who capitulated to company interests as it was to the company itself.

According to Mayer (1963:109), the colonial government brought out armed police - who fired five rounds at the strikers - to break the strike. Although no-one was injured, the resort to military force by the authorities signified that company interests were paramount. Five days later the strike was brought to an end with both parties agreeing to go to arbitration under Section 10 of the Industrial Disputes (Conciliation and Arbitration) Ordinance. The arbitrator, D.M.N. McFarlane, was to determine whether the wage agreed to between the company and the Union was "fair and reasonable" having regard to all

other conditions and, if not, what a fair and reasonable wage would be.

Immediately following the strike, however, a breakaway group gained control of the union. Certain union officials, amongst them the president and secretary, were dismissed and an acting president and secretary were appointed. The breakaway group demanded wider terms of reference for the arbitration tribunal, particularly to enable it to rule on the question of the FSIEA's claim to represent members employed on the mechanics list. The group was denied recognition by the colonial government and its demands with respect to the arbitration tribunal were ignored.⁸ Its emergence was sufficiently worrying to cause the colonial government to intervene clearly with the object of neutralising the breakaway group. A Commission of Inquiry was immediately established to look into the affairs of the Association, especially into the meetings the breakaway group held during August and September in Rakiraki and Lautoka. The findings of the inquiry commission enabled the Registrar General to order the expulsion of O'Neill and the breakaway group's publicity officer, Janki Ram, from the union - on the grounds that they were ineligible to hold office under the union's constitution - and to declare all the actions of the breakaway group invalid. O'Neill and Janki Ram appealed against their expulsion but they withdrew their appeal after the Union's executive committee amended its constitution in December to enable them to qualify for executive membership.

Both the inquiry and the expulsion order underlined the colonial government's control over trade unions. That it could unilaterally institute an inquiry into the union's internal affairs and use the union's own rules to get rid of two of the leading figures in the

breakaway group, testified to this. In a related development, the President of the FIWC, Mr B.D. Lakshman, resigned from the leadership of the FIWC following a no confidence motion passed in him by members of the FIWC executive in August. The reason for the no confidence motion was the role Lakshman had played in the unofficial strike by the mill workers in July (LCP 26 of 1959).⁹ Given the FIWC's close association with the colonial government it is not unreasonable to suppose that some advice might have been unofficially conveyed to the FIWC executive. Losing his position as FIWC President effectively denied Lakshman a voice in the sugar workers' dispute.

The breakaway faction which, it seems, was supported by a majority of workers, unambiguously represented a move by sugar workers to wrest control of their union from the moderate leadership that had long dominated it. If the first strike was in some respects a protest strike against union officials, the subsequent attempted coup by militants was subverted by the government's direct intervention. The second strike was patently a reaction to this interference in the union's affairs. Mayer (1963) certainly saw the second strike as a reaction by members of the union supporting the breakaway group to the investigating magistrate's report and presumably to the Registrar General's subsequent expulsion orders. That the workers and the union did not own to this - insisting that the strike was caused by the actions of two sirdars who intimidated workers in the lines - is not surprising given the powerlessness of unions vis a vis the state and the paradoxical fact that they could not afford to openly challenge the state. The sirdar incidents were evidently provoked to provide a pretext for the strike.¹⁰

The third strike in December was officially declared by the Union. It evidently

represented a protest against the company's decisions regarding the two sirdars. Although by this time Nand Kishore had resumed the position of president of the union, he was "compelled to some extent to throw in his lot with the militant Lautoka section"...as he was "given as his principal officers Janki Ram and O'Neill" both of whom, now legitimately made members of the union by a change in its constitution, were close associates of Lakshman (LCP 26 of 1959;17). The strike began on December 2, continued over a number of days and was reportedly accompanied by 'lawlessness' and violence at two of the largest mills. During the strike sirdars and members of their families reportedly suffered considerably (LCP 3 of 1958:5). Two lorry loads of police (a special squad) arrived in Lautoka on November 29th before the strike actually began, clearly in anticipation of the workers taking action. The strike ended a week later when the union, together with the protem President of the FIWC, C.P. Bidesi, agreed to the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry and to the suspension of the two sirdars pending the result of that inquiry. The findings of the resulting Hyne Commission vis a vis the sirdars in effect vindicated the company by endorsing the conclusions of its own inquiry into the incidents.

The Events of 1958

The main events of 1958 concerned the continuing struggle by militants to gain control of the union, which they succeeded in doing later that year, and the colonial government's enactment of the Industrial Disputes (Arbitration and Inquiry) Ordinance in April. The militants' struggle against the moderate leadership of Nand Kishore was recharged by the union's acceptance of the 1957 wage agreement before the MacFarlane arbitration tribunal and its capitulation to a wage agreement for 1958 that again fell far below the union's original claim.

The McFarlane arbitration concluded its hearings on the 1957 wage case in February 1958. The award as announced was made on the basis of arguments presented by counsel for both the union and the company, who had concurred in 'deem(ing) the agreement of July 1957 to be fair and reasonable'. McFarlane therefore endorsed the 1957 wage agreement between CSR and the FSIEA. Lakshman would later denounce the arbitration as a "miserable farce" and accuse the Labour Department and the government of "being under the complete domination and direction of the Company" (LCP 26 of 1959). His public indictment of the Company and the government seemed to leave Union officials and counsel unchallenged. However, Lakshman was working behind the scenes to depose Kishore.

At a general meeting of the FSIEA held at the Embassy Theatre in Ba on May 4 an attempt to shaft Kishore was made. The meeting had been called mainly to discuss what steps to take on the issue of representation of mechanics' list employees; this the union had again included on its agenda for the 1958 conference to the chagrin of the company which again rejected it outright together with the claim for an hourly wage of 2s 6d. Prior to the Ba meeting, the Lautoka branch held a meeting at which a series of resolutions believed to have been drafted by Lakshman, were adopted. These endorsed the demands for a 2s 6d wage, a system of job evaluation on lines adopted by the government for its PWD employees and asserted the "right to strike" as the "birthright of every worker in every democratic country". The last resolution, which with the others was published in the Hindi language newspaper Jagriti on April 11, appeared to be a response to the government's introduction of a new Industrial Disputes (Arbitration and Inquiry) Ordinance that very month, evidently to deal with sugar labour militancy. At the general

meeting at Ba, to which 'five busloads of members.. went or were taken from Lautoka' (Lakshman's base) a motion of no confidence was moved by a Mr Smith and seconded by one A Pickering (both 'Part-Europeans' and presumably employed on the mechanics list. However, the facts that the meeting had been disorderly and that Nand Kishore who was 'greeted with shouts calling for his resignation', had 'exercised his prerogative as chairman' and adjourned the meeting to the company lines at Ba, meant that the legality of proceedings from that point onwards was in doubt. The union's legal advisor maintained Kishore was still President but the dissident faction insisted that he had been deposed. Janki Ram wrote to Kishore on May 31st demanding he return all the union's books since he was no longer president (LCP 26 of 1959:9).

Following the Ba meeting, Kishore took steps to try and consolidate his position. He sacked one of his Assistant Secretaries, Sam Rounds, for an undisclosed reason but probably for the fact that Rounds had stayed on at the Embassy Theatre and continued to take minutes of the proceedings after Kishore had departed. Kishore also replaced, although temporarily, Janki Ram as secretary. In the union's negotiations with the company for a 1958 wage agreement, Kishore was also careful to avoid signing an agreement until he had received clear indications of acceptance of the company's counter-offer of a 20 per cent wage increase from the union's branches. At a union executive meeting on June 1, which was not attended by either Lautoka or Nadi branches (the two branches which had not indicated their support for the company's offer), the union agreed to accept the company's offer and a wage agreement was subsequently signed. Shortly afterwards, however, Kishore resigned from the presidency for health reasons and the agreement became the subject of another dispute. Kishore's resignation meanwhile left

the way open for Lakshman although he did not assume the leadership immediately. He needed firstly to extricate himself from the presidency of the International Airport Employees' Union which he did in July. At a meeting of the union's executive in October which the Honeyman Commission would later remark was mainly attended by those who 'could fairly well be described as friends of Mr Lakshman', B.D. Lakshman was elected President and Janki Ram general secretary (LCP 26 of 1959).

Lakshman's assumption of the presidency concluded what had been a long drawn out struggle to wrest power from the union's moderate leaders. The Honeyman Commission believed that Lakshman had been directing the FSIEA, through his supporters within it, for several months prior to his formal election. Lakshman had indeed publicly owned in May to having advised workers to depose Kishore but not to fill the presidency immediately. Lakshman's hand was also believed to be behind the resolution moved by Lui Ting at an executive committee meeting on July 6, alleging 'great discontent' amongst Association members over the way the 1958 agreement was signed, recalling the agreement from the Company and requesting a date for renegotiations to commence (LCP 26 of 1959).

With Lakshman now in the presidency the union stood firm on its position of rejection of the 1958 wage agreement and called for double the existing wage. The Company declined to enter into any discussions on the 1958 agreement however and informed the union in November that it regarded the agreement as binding. The union dug in its heels. Later that month Lakshman was authorised to warn the company that if it did not discuss the 1958 agreement the union would call a strike. Indeed a strike was called

for November 29th but it was called off without explanation and the matter of the 1958 agreement was implicitly dropped early in January 1959, when Lakshman asked the company to set a date for a conference to discuss a new wage for that year. Strike threats continued to be issued, however. When mill workers downed tools at Rarawai Mill in Ba in February 1959 Lakshman, at a meeting of the union's Lautoka Branch, threatened to call a general strike to support them. The threat marred conciliation proceedings which were then in progress. The following month, on the eve of the scheduled conference with the company to decide on the 1959 wage agreement, Lakshman reportedly made a 'somewhat inflammatory speech' at a general meeting of the union, demanding strict discipline from all union members and 'obedience to his commands' (LCP 26 of 1959 13).

As the Honeyman Commission reported later :

'According to a report of the meeting he received authority to command the services of 5,000 volunteers and to call strikes at all the five sugar mills in Fiji whenever he deemed that the occasion demanded'(LCP 26 of 1959:13).

At its March conference with the company, the union pressed its claim for a basic wage of 3s an hour and a reduction of the working week from 48 to 40 hours a week throughout the year. The company refused to meet the union's demands and proposed they go to arbitration under the 1958 Ordinance. The union declined to do this and the company alternatively proposed that an application be made for a wages council to cover the industry. Its subsequent application for a wages council was refused by the Governor in Council. For its part the union made a direct appeal to the Governor on April 23 when a deputation presented a memorandum setting out the union's case for a 3s an hour wage. The argument was based on an estimation of the average family's weekly food bill and the

barest minimum diet - ie that set out in the prison ordinance - was used as the basis for calculating this. The union also argued that the company could not argue inability to pay and claimed that public opinion was behind the workers. The deputation described the workers' living conditions as "dirt and squalor in the midst of plenty" (LCP 26 of 1959 14) and expressed its opposition to the 1958 Industrial Disputes (Arbitration and Inquiry) Ordinance. A week later this ordinance was invoked to deal with the dispute. A Sugar Board of Inquiry, headed by Q.C. GG Honeyman, was appointed under Section 8 (1) of the 1958 Ordinance on May 1 to inquire into the "causes and circumstances of a dispute which is apprehended between the CSR Company Ltd and the FSIEA and to make recommendations for the maintenance of industrial peace in the sugar milling industry" (LCP 26 of 1959).

The Industrial Disputes (Arbitration and Inquiry) Ordinance

Introduced in April 1958, the Industrial Disputes (Arbitration & Inquiry) Ordinance repealed the 1942 Industrial Disputes (Conciliation & Arbitration) Ordinance and made provision, as its name suggests, for both the establishment of arbitration tribunals to settle industrial disputes and for boards of inquiry to inquire into the economic and industrial conditions in the colony (Sutherland 1984:206). Clearly enacted to enable the colonial state to more effectively contain labour militancy, the new ordinance 'deliberately omitted any statutory conciliation machinery' (LCP 26 of 1959; 21) and was thus intended to enable the speedy and compulsory settlement of disputes. Under the new ordinance recourse to conciliation could only be had where parties to a dispute already had made provision for such conciliation proceedings in a previously concluded agreement (Sutherland 1984:207). As Sutherland notes, the likelihood of this was very small. More

significantly, Sutherland points out that the provision for Boards of Inquiry to be established to investigate the wider implications of workers' wage demands on the economy at large meant that henceforth workers' wage demands would be considered in the context of what was held to be 'the national interest' (Sutherland 1984:209). The fact that the CSR, during the Honeyman Inquiry, implicitly threatened to discontinue its Fiji operations if worker demands for a 3s wage were awarded (LCP 26 of 1959;26,30) meant that companies henceforth could similarly effectively blackmail Inquiry Commissions, whose brief was to make an award that would not adversely affect the national interest. Although the Honeyman Commission insisted it was exercising independent judgement on the wage matter, based on the evidence before it, it recommended an increase of only 3d an hour which was a far cry from the union's demand. Moreover, after receiving confidential information relating to the company's operations in Fiji, in particular its 'profitability and expenditure on capital development', the Commission was satisfied that the

'rate of profit earned by the company on its capital invested in Fiji was not unreasonable and that the distribution of the gross income of the company after allowing for purchases of raw material, depreciation etc, was fair as between the workers and the general body of shareholders' (LCP 26 1959;25).

Despite the intentions behind the new ordinance, it would not prove to be effective in enabling the state to deal with either the 1959 oilworkers' strike or the 1960 cane farmers' strike. Indeed, during both these strikes, the colonial state, realising the inadequacy of its industrial disputes legislation, sought wider emergency powers under the 1920 Public Safety Ordinance to effectively deal with worker/farmer militancy. The more stringent controls introduced in 1961 came as a reaction to both increased militancy in the

sugar industry and the ineffectiveness of existing disputes legislation.

The Sugar Industry Ordinance (No 53 of 1961) was inspired by the recommendations of yet another Fiji Sugar Industry Inquiry Commission, established in 1960 under Sir Malcolm Eve, immediately following a prolonged strike by cane growers over the terms of a new ten-year cane contract. Designed to "protect this vital industry as a whole and to prevent its disruption for reasons attributable to sectional interests" (Acting Chief Secretary in a letter to the FTUC, 22.11.1966, FTUC Archives, FIWC File), the Ordinance provided for the establishment of a Sugar Board, headed by an Independent Chairman and comprising a Vice chairman and accountant. It also provided for the establishment of a Sugar Advisory Council on which growers, the company and the government were represented but it prohibited politicians or lawyers from sitting on the council. Most significant of all was a clause in the Ordinance which criminalised hindering :

‘the planting, growing, harvesting...transporting or crushing of cane..the making of sugar at mills or transporting or storing of sugar’.

The penalty for an offence included imprisonment for up to two years. Although this clause would not be used against a strike leader until 1977, its inclusion in the ordinance acted as a major deterrent to strike action being taken by either growers or mill workers. It effectively denied sugar workers and farmers the right to strike, compelling them to refer disputes to the independent chairman for settlement. Should he fail to settle the dispute, the ordinance provided for the dispute to be referred to the Chief Justice who could appoint a person/s to adjudicate and make an award which could be made an order of the

court by any party to the dispute and therefore become enforceable.

With a new law now in place to deter sugar workers from striking, the colonial government took steps to purge the FSIEA of its militant leaders. Lakshman, who by 1959 had been re-elected to the Legislative Council in 1959 largely on the votes of sugar workers, had involved himself, albeit peripherally, in the oilworkers' strike, during which he publicly uttered militant statements. In August 1960, at the request of an FSIEA member, the government commenced an inquiry into the affairs of the union.¹¹ The FIWC President, Mohammed Ramzan was supportive of action being taken against Lakshman. He wrote to the government:

'It is hoped you will do everything possible within your power to have the affairs of the SIEA (sic) fully investigated. Request for audit of books by a competent auditor is more than justified' (Letter dated 29.5.61, Files of CMS, FTUC).

In 1962, following an inquiry which was conducted by Assistant Registrar-General, Vijay Singh, and, with the aid of the Industrial Associations' (Amendment) Ordinance (No 11 of 1962), Lakshman was expelled from the FSIEA. Singh's report said there was "little likelihood of the affairs of the union being conducted in accordance with the law as long as the president of the union remained in office" (Report of the Commissioner of Labour 1962;6).¹² He recommended that "the future conduct of the affairs of the union by its office bearers and central executive be kept under close observation to ensure compliance with the rules and the Industrial Associations Ordinance " (FT 21.2.62). The amendment to the Industrial Associations Ordinance empowered the Registrar of Industrial Associations to expel an office bearer of an industrial association for acting in

contravention of either the association's constitution or the Industrial Associations Ordinance. This greatly strengthened the hand of the colonial state and gave it a ready weapon with which to counter troublesome labour leaders.

Ramzan's complicity in the purging of Lakshman from the FSIEA is not surprising. As Lakshman had done before him, Ramzan was playing the moderate and responsible role expected of the President of the FIWC. By 1961, as we shall soon see, the FIWC was also being threatened by an alternative and much more militant federation of labour unions. It was in its interests to support the endeavours of the colonial government to crush labour militancy and weed out undesirable leaders. As we shall shortly see, the FSIEA was not the only union subjected to an official inquiry and subsequently faced with the expulsion of its leaders in this period. Indeed, this was to become an effective method of purging the union movement of militants.

The 1959 Strike and Disturbances

The 1959 oilworkers' strike was led by the Wholesale and Retail Workers' General Union. Registered in May 1958, the W&RWGU was the first general union to be organised since 1944 and its membership ranged across a number of industries, including the oil, tobacco, meat, garment and hotel industries. The founders of the W&RWGU included James Anthony, Mohammed (Apisai) Tora, Ratu Meli Gonewai and Michael Columbus - all of them young men in their early twenties. Lakshman, by some accounts, was also involved in some way in the formation of this union. Certainly some of his correspondence, sent out under the letterhead of the FSIEA early in 1959 is suggestive of both his involvement in the union's formation and foreknowledge of its 1959 agenda.¹³

From its very inception, the W&RWGU was militant and its leaders determined to win improvements in wages and conditions for its members by using direct action.

Through the efforts of the union, the oil industry became strongly organised - 75 per cent of the 300 odd oilworkers employed at Suva, Vuda Point and Nadi Airport were financial members of the union when the first log of claims was laid before the oil companies in 1959. The union began negotiations with Shell Company (Pacific Islands) Ltd and Vacuum Oil Company Pty Ltd for an increase in the basic wage from \$3/0/6 to \$4/15/- in October (West 1960;46). The oil companies offered to increase the minimum wage by 9s 6d a week from January 1 1960 and to re-open negotiations in February on the union's log of claims. The union, however, demanded that the proposed increase be given immediately and made retrospective to October 24 1959 and that its claim for overtime be accepted. When the company refused, the union, without notice according to the company, called a strike (FT 12.12.59).

The strike began early on December 7. Workers at Shell and Vacuum Oil installations at Walu Bay were instructed on how to peacefully picket within the law by Anthony and Gonewai. Police headquarters were informed at 7.15am that posters were being displayed and notices regarding the strike were being handed to people by Anthony. The Labour Department attempted to intervene but was told that the union " had no faith in the Department". Later that day at a public meeting attended by several hundred strikers and members of the public Anthony appealed for support to non-W&RWGU members. The tenor of his address was militant:

We can only succeed if we have solidarity and that is why I am asking you to help our cause. This is the first big strike Suva has seen and this is the chance we have been waiting for. If we don't get our demands we will shut down the whole of Suva (LCP 10 of 1960).

The colonial government was advised that evening that tension was rising in Suva and the following day, after a meeting between the Governor, the Acting Attorney General, the Commissioners of police, army and labour and the public relations officer, the government issued a statement via the public media which was repeated several times on radio, informing the public that the strike should not have taken place and condemning the union for not making full use of negotiating machinery (West 1960:46). The union issued a counter statement, protesting at the government's "siding with employers" and criticising the Labour Department for "lag(ing) behind the hopes and aspirations of the working community at large" and for "only tak(ing) notice of anything... when a strike is on". It added :

The declared policy of the Labour Department is to remain neutral in wage matters and when a strike is on we expect the Labour Department and the government to remain impartial(FT 11.12.59).

Later in the day, police despatched a half-unit of a riot squad to one of the oil company depots after a government car was impounded by striking workers (LCP 10 of 1960).

On December 9, bus and taxi drivers joined the strike together with 300 casual workers at Lautoka. The government and the oil companies met and decided to supply oil to four petrol stations in the city. Police-escorted tankers, driven by Europeans, made deliveries to these gas stations, which were put under police guard. The union

telegraphed the companies complaining that they were using "unfair measures to crush the workers' right to strike" by using non-union labour and supplying petrol stations for general use. At least one gas station operator was threatened with assault if buses were supplied with petrol and Indian and Fijian drivers who attempted to get petrol were reportedly abused and obstructed. Talks held between the Commissioner of Labour and the union's legal advisor, Andrew Deoki, produced no results (LCP 10 of 1960).

That afternoon matters became more serious. Anthony was to have addressed strikers at a vacant area near the bus station where large crowds were stranded for lack of public transport. Worried by the "crowds of unusual size" in Suva at the time - consisting largely of young men, "many of them sullen" - and by the atmosphere of tension and the presence of "some convicted criminals", police officers attempted to disperse the crowd. Police Commissioner Beaumont testified later at the special inquiry into the "disturbances" that followed that the crowd "showed defiance" and its mood was "ugly and aggressive" (LCP 10 of 1960). A police riot squad despatched to the scene announced there would be no meeting and refused to let Anthony speak. The crowd was ordered to disperse. When it failed to do so, police threw tear gas bombs into it. This provoked stone-throwing which resulted in more smoke bombs and then the situation descended into a general riot, with "hooligan elements" rampaging through the streets, smashing shop windows and looting. Violence continued through the night and into the next day when some "Europeans' cars and some Europeans were stoned" (West 1960). The government snapped into action. Armed with safety regulations introduced under the Public Safety Ordinance, a curfew was imposed on the three main towns between 7pm and 5am, police were given arbitrary powers of search and arrest without warrants, outdoor gatherings of

more than three people were prohibited and army, territorial and police reserves were called up (West 1960). Armed soldiers began patrolling streets alongside police. The government's most effective action in neutralising the strikers, however, involved a surreptitiously orchestrated public meeting at which Fijian strikers, lured by rumours that Anthony and Tora were to address them, were directly appealed to, as Fijians, by their traditional chiefs.

One of the more perplexing, and worrying, features of the disturbances as far as the colonial government and Western observers were concerned was why the mainly Fijian rioters had vented their rage on Europeans - or the property of Europeans - in particular, when a "protectionist" colonial policy towards the native Fijians should have favourably predisposed Fijians towards Europeans generally. West (1960) aptly conveys the European assumption that their antipathy towards Indians should be shared by Fijians:

...the Europeans (in Fiji) have liked the attractive, friendly Fijians, and tended to dislike the Indians. Thus it is on the surface surprising that in a disturbed situation Fijians should have displayed anti-European sentiments and not that anti-Indian feeling which people have always expected and perhaps feared, and that where the Indians joined in the riots or simply looked on, it was in support of the rioters (1960:49).

That the strike represented class action by organised workers across racial categories and that the main target of the riots was capital, were undeniable facts, as West noted:

The fact suggested by the riots is that Fijians and Indians might act together against Europeans who, few in number (6402 in 1956), provide most senior government officials and most of the capital investment in Fiji (1960; 49).

Yet the colonial government and its sympathisers told themselves otherwise, employing the racial ideologies that were their own creation:

The European tendency, and that of the Fijian chiefs, has been to imply that if the Fijians rioted, they must have been incited and egged on by alien anti-European provocateurs and by hooligans: by implication Indians or outsiders (West 1960;49).

Armed with such a perception, and with the clear intention of dividing workers racially, the colonial government gave permission for a public meeting to be held on December 10 and let the word go out that Anthony and Tora would address the meeting. Instead of Anthony and Tora, however, the crowd of between 2000 and 3000 people (mainly Fijians) were addressed by leaders of the newly-formed and chiefly-dominated Fijian Association who were also the nominated Fijian members of the Legislative Council (FT 14.12.59).¹⁴ Although the Association's president, Ratu Edward Cakobau told the meeting there was no intention to "cajole the Fijians away from those who worked with them", all speakers expressed their deep sorrow, and especially their shame, over the fact that it was mainly Fijians who were responsible for the rioting, and pleaded with Fijians not to be "misled" and "used" by "others" (FT 14.12.59). The leaders urged Fijians in Suva to

use the Fijian Association as a channel through which they could get their leaders to make contact with the government, the firms and the City Council on matters affecting the Fijians (FT 14.12.59).

At a later meeting, convened the same day by Ratu Penaia Ganilau (as Roko Tui Cakaudrove) for people of the provinces of Bua, Macuata and Cakaudrove, other Fijian chiefs and Fijian Administration officers reiterated the warning to Fijians against taking "the advice of trouble-makers":

You were brought up in the proper way at your villages. Don't follow other people. The people who have started this situation are the people who have blackened our names (FT 14.12.59).

These unequivocally communal appeals to working class Fijians to see themselves as Fijians rather than as workers, and to feel shame for having tarnished the good name of Fijians, were reinforced by an appeal to Fijian pride by the Fiji Times. In an editorial proclaiming that the "wave of insensate violence by young hooligans was essentially of an un-Fijian character", the newspaper declared:

there are no grounds whatever to suggest that anybody has succeeded in pushing the Fijian into the path which some non-Fijians, both inside and outside Fiji, would like them to follow for devious reasons (FT 14.12.59).

The underlying theme in the newspaper's appeal to Fijians was that Fijians were a people whose reputation for "unwavering loyalty to the Throne" was widely known and that they were clearly being used by "others".

The racially divisive strategy that the colonial government employed with the aid of Fijian chiefs, paid off well. Not only was the strike settled as a result of a split in the W&RWGU executive but also, in the aftermath of the strike, several unions (including the W&RWGU itself) were rent by racial divisions, resulting in the formation of a number of racially-exclusive unions. The intervention by members of the Fijian chiefly ruling class exposed the interlinked interests of this class and the colonial state, by whose patronage it had been fortified. A rebellious, urban Fijian working class posed an obvious threat to the continuing authority of the Fijian aristocracy.

The settlement of the oilworkers' strike on December 15 - with an agreement to refer the dispute to arbitration¹⁵ - was clearly the result of connivance on the part of Gonewai, the FIWC and Ratu Mara. Gonewai had taken "control of the strike" from the

evening of the 11th, after Anthony apparently took ill and was confined to bed on the advice of a doctor. While Anthony slept, after taking some tablets Gonewai had given him, Gonewai took Tora to meet representatives of the oil companies at the FBC where they were presented with a draft agreement negotiated by the FIWC on the W&RWGU's behalf. The fact that Anthony learned of this draft agreement much later suggests that the FIWC's involvement had not been decided by the full W&RWGU executive and that Gonewai had been covertly working to secure a settlement. Indeed Gonewai told the Inquiry that had he not taken control of the strike when he did, it might have gone on for some time. Although Gonewai was generally happy with the draft settlement agreement, and had managed to get most other executive members to acquiesce, Anthony, when he learned of it, was not. However, the executive was now divided and Anthony and Tora were in the minority and under pressure to sign the FIWC-drafted agreement. Gonewai solicited the help of Ratu Mara and John Falvey and told them he had the support of all members of the executive except Anthony. Anthony and Tora were later that day pressured to sign the agreement by the rest of the union's executive (LCP 10 of 1960).

Anthony told the Fiji Times on December 15 that he and Tora were "dissatisfied with the terms of the agreement" and had signed it "under extreme pressure from the remaining six members of the executive of the union". He said if sufficient money could be raised by public subscriptions he would go to London, with Tora if funds permitted, to discuss "social, economic and political conditions in Fiji" with the Secretary of State for the Colonies (FT 16.12.59). The following day, Anthony tried to hold a public meeting in Lautoka but was refused permission. He reacted to the refusal by tearing up a copy of the UN Declaration of Human Rights in front of the Police Superintendent at Lautoka. The

following week he defied the authorities by holding two public meetings without seeking a permit, on December 21 and 23 at Lautoka and Suva, although these were held "behind closed doors" (FT 23.12.59). At these meetings, Anthony appealed for financial support to aid the union's arbitration case.

Anthony, and B.D. Lakshman, also attempted to abort the Commission of Inquiry into the disturbances (LCP 10 of 1960). Lakshman was fined \$10 for failing to appear at the Inquiry. Anthony and Tora appeared but made it clear they were not taking part in it of their own free will. Only Gonewai appeared happy to assist the Inquiry. The report of Commissioner Lowe, who conducted the inquiry, was released in February 1960. It was surprisingly sympathetic to the strikers. Lowe found that dissatisfaction from low wages - indeed inability to make ends meet - was a primary cause of mass support for the oilworkers strike; that delays by the oil companies in opening negotiations on wages and conditions had precipitated the strike; that the union had at one stage followed Labour Department advice, to no avail; that the government statement had inflamed the union and the distribution of petrol, following so soon after this statement, looked like an attempt by the government to frustrate the efforts of the strikers. Importantly, Lowe affirmed the union's legal right to strike:

It cannot be questioned that they were legally entitled to strike, and without warning. There was and is no law in existence to the contrary (LCP 10 of 1960).

However, Lowe condemned what he considered Anthony's method of keeping the strikers within the law and out of trouble while being prepared to break the law by using "strongarm men" to further the ends of the union if necessary (LCP 10 of 1960). Other

than flimsy circumstantial evidence (such as the presence of non-unionists in the unions office, two of whom were recognised as ex-criminals) there was nothing to support Lowe's finding that Anthony had actively enlisted the help of "strongarm men" to further the union's cause.¹⁶ Indeed, the fact that the police had provoked the disturbances is clear even from a reading of the Fiji Times account of events. Commissioner Lowe's report not only vindicated the police actions, it discredited Anthony for employing methods that could only be described as devious, and which brought trade unions into disrepute. Perhaps knowing that Anthony could not have cared less about Lowe's judgement, the colonial government itself employed devious means to get rid of him. Early in 1960 it offered Anthony a scholarship to go abroad to study, which he accepted.

Disempowering the W&RWGU

With Anthony out of the way, the colonial government then took deliberate steps over the next two years to completely disempower the W&RWGU. First, it encouraged Ratu Meli Gonewai's formation in March 1960 of a breakaway Fiji Oil Workers' Union. Then, in 1961, it introduced a Wages Council (the first such Council in the colony's history) to cover the Wholesale and Retail Industry. Later that year, the Registrar of Industrial Associations ordered an inquiry into the affairs of the union and its office bearers. All of these moves were part of a campaign to erode the power of the W&RWGU.

The Gonewai-led breakaway of oil workers in 1960 deprived the union of a significant number of its members. And the government's introduction of the Viti Levu Wholesale and Retail Trades Wages Council in 1961 was patently aimed at further eroding

the union's base. The action not only flew in the face of the government's, and the FIWC's, declared policy that wages councils should only be established in industries where workers were not organised,¹⁷ it also ignored the long-recognised need for statutory wage fixing in the tailoring and transport industries, noted in several Labour Commissioner reports. The government's claim that the W&RWGU

did not represent all workers employed in the industry and there were serious doubts about whether they had a majority (Labour Department Report 1961)

undermined the union, as did its report that the Wages Council was "unique in that not one of the W&RWGU representatives was a person engaged in the industry" (Labour Department Report 1961). Despite these two developments, the union remained undaunted. It enlarged its membership by organising butchery, tobacco, garment and hotel workers and called two strikes in 1961 and 1962 at Wahleys Butchery and Carreras Ltd. The 1961 inquiry was indeed called to try to stop the W&RWGU from operating as a general union.

The inquiry magistrate narrowly demarcated the classes of workers that the union could enrol as members - ie only "those engaged in the business of selling commodities" (FT 5.2.62) - and consequently ruled many of those enrolled as members ineligible for membership. Tora vehemently rejected the findings of the Inquiry:

No union in Fiji can accept Mr McLoughlin's findings because to do so would mean the death of trade unionism in this country (FT 5.2.62)

Like the inquiry into the FSIEA conducted in the same year, this inquiry also focussed on whether union officials were complying with the union's constitution and with

the Industrial Associations Ordinance and, like the FSIEA inquiry, it found a number of instances where they were not. The union's refusal to comply with the Registrar's directives relating to demarcation led to the expulsion of 14 union officials, including Tora, in 1962. Tora's response was characteristically audacious. He told the Fiji Times:

I suppose [the Registrar of Industrial Associations] would know that the matter does not end here. We have started something and it should be known, not only to him, but also to those concerned, that we never stop halfway at doing things (FT 5.2.62)

The government responded with a second inquiry into the union's affairs. The union's deregistration in 1963 followed soon after this inquiry was concluded.

The W&RWGU's deregistration showed the ultimate power of the colonial state over labour organisations. Although deregistration of unions that had become defunct was common enough, the use of deregistration to demolish a troublesome union which showed no signs of conforming to the model of responsible unionism, was not. The W&RWGU had displayed an intolerable degree of militancy not just by calling the strike of 1959, which had resulted in serious anti-capital rioting and the near-destruction of the Labour department's own offices. In 1961 it had also formed a militant alternative to the FIWC and organised a demonstration march through Suva, in March of that year to protest against the Commissioner of Labour and against FIWC representation on the Wages Council. More seriously, it had challenged the state by defiantly rejecting the findings of an official inquiry and ignoring the Registrar's instructions. By continuing to organise workers across a wide range of industries it was operating as a general union and this was anathema to the colonial government.

The experience of the W&RWGU was not to be repeated. In 1964, the government introduced the Trade Union Ordinance to deal with the 'problem' of outsiders assuming leadership positions within unions and to curtail the operation of general unions. The ordinance replaced the Industrial Associations Ordinance of 1942 and added new controls on trade unions (Sutherland 1984). All trade unions were required to re-register under the new Ordinance. To qualify for registration, they had to meet the requirements of the new ordinance. These requirements included, amongst other things, the annual submission of audited financial statements, of three copies of all alterations to the constitution and rules and of all new rules (and of the constitution in force) and a list of all changes of officers and trustees made by the union in the preceding 12 months. The ordinance provided the Registrar with power to refuse or to cancel the registration of unions on specific grounds and laid down strict qualifying criteria for those holding office in trade unions to exclude persons with criminal convictions for fraud or dishonesty and illiterates. It made it mandatory for all officers of a union with the exception of the Secretary, to be, and to have been, employed in the industry for no less than a year. It also restricted trade unionists to holding office in only one union.

In addition to the Trade Union Ordinance, two other ordinances - the Trades Disputes (Arbitration, Inquiry & Settlement) and the Employment Ordinances - were introduced in 1964. The new Disputes law, which repealed the Essential Services (Arbitration) Ordinance and the 1958 Disputes Ordinance, made no provision for compulsory arbitration but rather "relied for its efficacy on punishment for breach of contract" (LCP 23 1965;12). It required workers in essential services to give 28 (rather than 21) days strike notice and made provision for the Commissioner of Labour to

conciliate in disputes. The most significant feature of the Employment Ordinance was its statutory provision for a Labour Advisory Board consisting of government, employers and unions, to advise the government on matters concerning labour and employment. Although a Labour Advisory Board had been in existence since 1947, the ordinance made statutory provision for such a body.

It is significant that FIWC representatives on the Labour Advisory Board approved the new Trade Union Ordinance. By 1963, the effect of FIWC's cooption into government-convened consultative bodies like the Labour Advisory Board and Wages Councils could already be seen in the acquiescence of labour leaders within this peak body to new controls on labour and new strategies of cooption. The FIWC was in fact appraised of the new legislation early in January 1963 when a confidential copy of the draft legislation was sent by the Commissioner of Labour to Ramzan with the following instructions:

...the draft bill should be treated as confidential by your organisation since, until government has had a chance to consider the recommendations of the Labour Advisory Board, and to formulate its own views, especially on the provisions of the confidential clauses, it is considered that it would be premature for copies of the bill to be sent to any bodies other than those agreed to; to give fuller publicity at this stage to the provisions of the draft bill (Commissioner of Labour to Ramzan 3.1.63. FTUC Archives).

The FIWC approved of the bill and the only trade union opposition came from the Fijian Federation of Labour which organised a protest march of 250 people through Suva to Government House to present a petition to the Acting Governor opposing the draft bill which the Labour Advisory Board approved in July 1963 (Department of Labour Report

1963:7). The effects of the new law, which encouraged establishment-based unions was seen in the larger number of small unions which emerged after 1964.

Before turning to consider other strategies employed by the colonial government to undermine labour militancy in the latter part of the 1960's, we should briefly look at why the FIWC was so easily coopted by the colonial state in the aftermath of the 1959 strike.

The Fijian Federation of Labour and the Cooption of the FIWC

What is significant about the FIWC's role following the 1959 strike is that it functioned to support the colonial state in the latter's concerted efforts to undermine and erode the base of the W&RWGU. The FIWC's active participation in the colonial government's first Wages Council, despite Ramzan's earlier statement that he did not want to see such councils established where workers were already organised, signified its cooption by the state in the strategy to weaken the W&RWGU. Its support of the 1964 Trade Union Act, designed to curtail general unions, similarly aligned it with the colonial government. That the FIWC had interests of its own to protect is clear. These interests largely explain its actions in the years following the strike.

Hince (1971; 381-382) noted that the FIWC's strong affirmation of state-favoured industrial unionism was based on both a reaction against general unions - which could consolidate unions across industry barriers into groups of greater numerical strength - and a reaction against the W&RWGU. Both of these concerns were related and had to do with the position that the FIWC assumed for itself, and was determined to maintain, as the sole peak organisation of trade unions in the colony. General unions, by combining workers

across industries, posed a potential threat in that they could numerically present a solid force, especially under strong leadership, which might threaten the FIWC's claim to represent workers across industries. The W&RWGU, for instance, sought to organise workers in the oil distribution industry, in the retail trade, in manufacturing, processing and the hotel and catering industries. In 1959 the union's membership totalled around 1000 (Hince 1971; 378). The goals and strategies of the W&RWGU were vastly different from those adopted by the more conservative FIWC leadership and when in 1961 the union formed the Fijian Federation of Labour (FFL), as a militant alternative to the FIWC, it directly challenged FIWC's hitherto undisputed leadership of the labour movement.

Formed in 1961, the FFL's founding affiliates were the W&RWGU, the Transport Workers Union (registered in May 1960) and the Government Wage Employees Union (registered in July 1960). Although, in retrospect, the FFL presented no real threat to the FIWC - it was denied recognition by the colonial government and ignored - the fact that it emerged at all and assumed a high public profile by staging demonstrations, set the FIWC leaders on edge and led them to support the colonial government's efforts to undermine the FFL's protagonists. As it happened, the FFL survived only as long as its founding affiliates did. All three unions which had formed the FFL had been deregistered by the end of 1964.¹⁸

Disorganising the last of the militant general unions

Militant general unions did not completely disappear from the scene, however. Apisai Tora went on to form another militant general union, the Airport & General Workers Union (A&GWU) in 1965 and, following the dismissal of three union members

from the Korolevu Beach Hotel in 1965, the union called a strike. When management threatened to bring in scab labour from surrounding villages, several accommodation units or "bures" at the hotel were burned down and an attempt was made to set the hotel on fire. Tora was arrested and charged with inciting the strikers to arson. Although he was acquitted of the charge, six others of his union were imprisoned for the offence. Significantly, later that year, the government announced its intention to establish two further Wages Councils, in the Hotel and Catering Industry and in the transport industry and these were duly established in 1966. The Hotel and Catering Industry Wages Council clearly represented an attempt to erode the base of the A&GWU.

The union, however, seemed unperturbed and indeed grew more powerful in the following years. It amended its constitution and changed its name in 1966, and amended its constitution again in 1967, to allow it to enlist members from other industries, particularly the building industry which had no union.¹⁹ In 1967, the Airport Hotel & Catering Workers Union (AH&CWU) (as the A&GWU was now called) also won a 20% wage increase for its members employed by the government in the Airport Crash Fire Services following arbitration but was advised by the arbitrator not to use the case to seek similar increases for others of its members whether within or outside government. Ignoring this advice, the union brought claims for a 100% wage increase and numerous improved conditions concurrently against Qantas, Fiji Airways Ltd and two building and civil engineering firms later in the year. The Fiji Municipal Workers' Union made an "almost identical" claim against the Suva City Council. Concerned at the "number and magnitude" of the claims and at the "probability of similar claims being lodged in other sectors", the colonial government quickly intervened (LCP 10 of 1968;9). It appointed a Board of

Inquiry under the new Industrial Disputes (Arbitration, Inquiry & Settlement) Ordinance to inquire into the dispute and especially into the likely implications of the unions' wage claims for the Fiji economy and the tourist industry.

The union responded with a protest strike by Qantas workers and gave 28 days notice that its members in the Airport Crash Fire Services would withdraw their labour in sympathy. Qantas workers stayed on strike for three weeks and both unions boycotted the Board of Inquiry which decided, in any case, that the unions' claims could only be "disastrous for the economy of Fiji" (LCP 34 of 1967;8).²⁰ The AH&CWU also held a six day strike without notice in two building companies in October that year and attempted to disrupt transport services by pressuring bus and taxi drivers to join the strike. This drew a stern warning from Chief Minister, Ratu Mara, who announced Public Safety Regulations and warned that the government would deal effectively with any disorder.

In 1968, following the breakdown of wage negotiations between the AH&CWU and Nadi hoteliers, Tora called the union's members employed by Qantas and Nadi hotels out on a stopwork. In response, Nadi hoteliers and Qantas withdrew their recognition of the union.²¹ This resulted in Tora's resignation from the union and deregistration followed four months later, in August 1968.²² It was not coincidental that, immediately following the union's deregistration, workers in the hotel and catering and building industries as well as airline workers formed three separate unions, the Fiji Hotel & Catering Employees Union, the Building Workers Union and the Airline Workers Union respectively. The speed with which these unions were formed and registered and the Labour Commissioner's approving comment in his report for the year suggest that some

assistance from the Department might have been forthcoming in the formation of these organisations which conformed to the approved model:

The formation of these three unions is in line with and consolidates the pattern of development of industrially-based unions which has been successfully established in Fiji (Labour Department Report 1968).

So ended the era of general unions in Fiji.

Other Disorganising Strategies Employed by the Colonial State

Two other disorganising strategies employed by the colonial state in this period of ascendant militancy were the tacit encouragement of exclusively-Fijian, breakaway unions and the cooption of unions into state-sponsored joint consultative bodies. The former had the effect of fragmenting and weakening the union movement, the latter encouraged 'responsible unionism' by engaging union leaders in discussions with employers and the government that went beyond negotiations for improved wages and conditions.

The fact that a number of exclusively Fijian unions emerged in the immediate aftermath of the 1959 strike suggests that various forces were at work to divide the trade union movement. The racially-divisive strategy employed by Fijian chiefs during the strike was motivated by the worry that militancy among urban Fijian commoners might eventually metamorphose into a challenge of chiefly authority and the traditional order. For the colonial government, a splintered union movement presented less trouble than a united, militant movement and "race" was an easy factor to encourage division around. The splits in the labour movement caused by breakaway Fijian unions were, moreover, conveniently used as a deterrence argument against militancy. As Sutherland (1984) put it,

the official attitude seemed to be that such splits would continue to occur if union leaders "did not behave responsibly". The facts that between 1959 and 1962 six exclusively Fijian unions were permitted to register²³ and that the colonial government remained silent on their emergence until 1962 (Sutherland 1984) suggests that there might even have been tacit encouragement of breakaway unions. The Labour Department's first statement on breakaway unions, issued on August 17, 1962, certainly indicated a very ambiguous position : while claiming that it disapproved of the development of splinter unions and advised those concerned that their actions only weakened the union movement, the Department admitted it had given assistance to their formation because it "had a public duty to assist any group of employees... in all matters connected with labour relations" (LCP 15 of 1963:10).

The FIWC also maintained relative silence over the matter until Ramzan's own union, the Public Works & Allied Workers Union (which later became the Public Employees Union) was itself afflicted with racial division by the formation of the Fijian Engineering Workers Union in 1962 (renamed the Fijian Government Workers' Union in 1965). The division in the PW&AWU was the subject of much discussion and correspondence between the FIWC and the government, especially after the latter granted "limited recognition" to the splinter union in 1963 (LCP 12 1964;7). The FIWC (Ramzan) wrote on at least two occasions to the Colonial Secretary to protest at the colonial government's limited recognition of the Fijian Engineering Workers Union and accused the government of "encouraging breakaway unions" (Letters to C.S. dated May 13 and December 20, 1963, FIWC Files, FTUC Archives).

Largely as a result of the pressure exerted by the FIWC, the Labour Advisory Board in 1964 took a stand on breakaway unions and the 1964 Trade Union Act included a clause that was intended to prevent the registration of a union where one already existed in a particular industry. This did not, however, eradicate exclusively Fijian unions - both the Fijian Government Workers' Union and the Fijian Teachers Union (later Association) were able to register under the 1964 Ordinance (LCP 23 of 1966:24). What is more, the continuing conflict between the two government employees unions provided the context for a new mechanism of control introduced in 1965. In the latter half of that year, the FIWC implicitly abandoned its protests at the government's effective recognition of the FGWU and its rejection of the suggestion by the government that the two unions should jointly negotiate with the government.²⁴ In September the two unions were engaged in joint negotiations with the government and, as a result of this 'breakthrough' in the relationship between the two unions, a new machinery, the Joint Industrial Council, had been set up. The establishment of this new machinery signified an important achievement for the government for the JIC was conceived as more than a vehicle for negotiating terms and conditions of employment and it had been brought in as a consequence of the division amongst organised government workers. While a defeated Ramzan lamented that "a substitute" (for a single trade union) had had to be agreed to through which the goals of the trade union movement could be achieved, the government celebrated the formation of the JIC and commended the two unions for the "spirit of goodwill" which resulted in its formation (FT 23.9.65). More than a means of negotiating terms and conditions of employment, the Council was to be a

forum for the exchange of ideas and views, the results of which would lead to an increase in the efficient conducting of Government business and an improvement in the already good relations existing between both sides (FT 23.9.65)

The idea of "joint consultation" which lay behind the new machinery and which was clearly aimed at containing labour, had been publicly promoted as early as 1960 by the new (and first local) Labour Commissioner, John Amputch, who advanced the concept at a Rotary Club address (Sutherland 1984;329). Joint consultation of course required the cooperation of employers as well as unions. The formation of the Fiji Employers' Consultative Association in 1960, six months after the 1959 strike, facilitated promotion of the idea among employers. FECA had been formed by leading employers who, as Kuruduadua put it "rightly realised the need to organise themselves against the might of the trade unions in Fiji" (Kuruduadua 1979). Its first director, J. Grundy, put it plainly to employers that:

Failure... to form and join employers' associations, particularly in a territory such as Fiji, where there is developing political consciousness, is obstructive and selfish (FT 17.12.60)

According to Sutherland (1984), capital and the state determined to make joint consultation a reality. In the following years, efforts were concentrated on drawing organised labour into an "institutional arrangement where it could be more effectively controlled" (Sutherland 1984). That this was achieved largely through the cooperation of the FIWC is clear. Led by the example of Ramzan's own union, the PW&AWU, other moderate unions affiliated to the FIWC entered into joint consultative councils or bodies with employers in their industries.

Conclusion

The militancy of labour unions which marked this period of colonial history, from 1957 - 1969, represented a departure from the moderate, responsible unionism of the

1940's and early 1950's. The colonial state's responses to labour militancy and especially to the 1959 strike demonstrated that organised labour, combined in action across industries and racial categories, was recognised as something that had to be contained. The various (overt and covert) strategies outlined in this chapter that were used by the colonial state from 1957 - 1969 - including the enactment of constraining legislation and the subjection of unions to official inquiries and deregistration under them; the use of racially divisive strategies during strikes; the tacit encouragement of ethnically-based splinter unions (as breakaways from militant organisations); the establishment of wages councils to undermine unions; and the introduction of joint consultative machinery as the first formal mechanism for coopting moderate labour leaders - were all intended to stamp out militancy in the trade union movement. At the end of 1969, on the eve of Fiji's independence, the colonial government may well have felt confident about having achieved its goal in this regard. The formation of FECA in 1960, as the employers' counterpart to the state-formed FIWC, completed the basis for a more formal mechanism of containment which would be later put in place by the post-colonial state.

Endnotes

1. The number of man-days lost in 1971, 1972 and 1973 were respectively 70,920, 214,721 and 807,972.
2. The Honeyman Commission denied that the Company's occupational arrangements reflected deliberate racial discrimination on the company's part or encouraged inter-ethnic rivalry. In response to witnesses who alleged that they received lower pay "because their skins were black", the commission said it "deplored this attempt to introduce racial prejudice".
3. The Honeyman Inquiry report referred to "resistance" on the part of mechanics list employees to the greater recruitment of Fijians and Indians to skilled occupations in the industry (LCP 26 of 1959:2). Lui Ting also gave evidence that at its first meeting, the union resolved that only mechanics who were 'Part-European' would serve on the executive.
4. C.A. Eyre, giving evidence at the Honeyman Inquiry, spoke of workers on the labourers' list being transferred to the mechanics' list from time to time if they were found to be doing jobs of mechanics.
5. At least two busloads of workers (presumably workers employed on the Mechanics List and therefore largely Part-European) were taken by O'Neill to the FSSWU revival meeting at Ba for the likely purpose of "stifling the revival". They were barred from attending by 'the President' of the FSSWU, C.A. Eyre, who announced that "only financial members of the Union could take part"(LCP 26 of 1959:4). Clearly there had been a speedy campaign by Eyre to sign up financial members prior to the meeting in anticipation of conflict arising between supporters of the revival effort and those who were in favour of being represented by the FSIEA. Other Part-European members of the FSIEA were later involved in the move by militants to depose Nand Kishore from the FSIEA presidency.
6. Company involvement in the revival of the FSSWU, to which it extended recognition in 1951, is suggested by evidence given to the Honeyman Commission that some officials of the Company were seen in the vicinity of the revival meeting in Ba (LCP 26 of 1959:5). Although the Honeyman Commission rejected the suggestion of company involvement, it seems reasonable to suppose that the Company might well have encouraged the union's resuscitation, given its strong opposition to FSIEA's avowed intentions regarding mechanics' list employees.
7. Lakshman claimed at the Honeyman Inquiry that the FSTU had only 18 members; Eyre told the Inquiry the union had 238 financial members at the end of 1938 (Fiji Times 2.7.59:3)
8. The arbitration hearing received no submission from those who were recognised as the legitimate officers of the union, but this was hardly surprising since union officials had signed the wage agreement - the workers' wage claims were made in defiance of that agreement. The union finally made a submission to the arbitration

tribunal in January 1958, by which time its leadership had changed and two members of the breakaway group, O'Neill and Janki Ram, were installed in the Executive as Vice-President and General Secretary respectively (LCP 26 of 1959).

9. The Honeyman Commission highlighted the role played by Lakshman, whom it saw as trying to gain a position of power in the FSIEA, and 'his associates' who sought to place him there. In 1957, Lakshman was President of FIWC, having assumed the position after Pandit Ami Chandra's death in 1954. In that capacity he attended meetings between the FSIEA and the CSR in May and June 1957. Although there was no evidence of his having organised the strike he was identified as the drafter of a resolution committing the union to strike action passed at the union's general meeting at Lautoka in May. Striking workers at Lautoka had also demanded his involvement the night they downed tools and even though this was consistent with their defiance of their own union officials, he seemed to know in advance about the strike and to be encouraging the workers. In a two hour address, he praised the workers for their action and, by his own admission, from that point onwards he 'managed the strike'. The workers' insistence that he be involved in negotiations with the company delayed settlement of the strike as the company refused, seeing Lakshman as a meddler in the union's affairs and in company-union relations. Lakshman had had to persuade workers to accept the negotiations being opened without him which they did, resulting in the appointment of the McFarlane arbitration court. Lakshman was certainly identified as the key influence behind the breakaway move. Ting and O'Neill and Janki Ram were believed to be close associates of his. Circulars and correspondence sent out under the imprint of the Association by the breakaway group bore his address and phone number in Lautoka. These were all matters which the inquiry into the affairs of the FSIEA investigated. In December Lakshman sought the position of union president - nominated by O'Neill - but lost to Nand Kishore in the executive committee election (LCP 26 of 1959;7).
10. This seemed to be the conclusion of the Commission of Inquiry set up to investigate the alleged sirdir incidents. While finding that the bullying threats and high-handed behaviour on one of the sirdars indicted, albeit provoked by a worker, had gone beyond "permitted limits", Commissioner Hyne dismissed the argument that this had caused the strike as mere subterfuge, to "divert attention away from the real reasons" which "went much deeper". These real reasons were not, however, revealed or made clear by Commissioner Hyne. The Hyne Report made gratuitous suggestions of political elements outside the union, and indeed outside the country, at work. Such suggestions of a wider conspiracy were nothing if not indicative of the tenor of the times when worker militancy was linked to notions of communist influences from abroad and an imagined global political agenda (LCP 3 of 1958).
11. The inquiry was initiated as a result of a request from one DT Murgessan, who had seemingly organised a campaign to get the union's affairs investigated by writing letters to the union demanding annual financial statements for the years 1958 to 1960 and making inquiries into the collection of subscriptions and other levies at branch level. In May 1961 Murgessan asked the Registrar of Industrial Associations to hold an inquiry alleging a number of irregularities.

12. The inquiry held Lakshman responsible for maintaining office bearers who were incapable or incompetent of performing their functions; for denying branches their constitutional right to annually elect their own office bearers and delegates to the executive; and for failing to keep the executive and the union generally informed of the financial position of the union. Lakshman was found to be the "de facto secretary and treasurer of the union" and acted wrongly in failing to hand over the books of account to the Treasurer while absent from Fiji for a period of several months, handing them over to his son instead, who had no authority to keep them (Report of the Commissioner of Labour 1962).
13. For instance, Lakshman wrote in February 1959 of the need to reorganise FIWC immediately because 1959 was "a critical year in which workers must either strongly organise or remain disorganised and take their place at the bottom of the ladder as hewers of wood and drawers of water". He later called the FIWC a "puppet body assisting the employers more than the workers" and called for a meeting of all trade unions in Lautoka to form a "proper Fiji Trade Unions Congress" (Letters from Lakshman (as President FSIEA) dated 7.1.59, 12.2.59, Chini Mazdur Sangh file, FTUC Archives).
14. The Fijian Association was founded in 1956 as an organisation committed to protecting "Fijian political rights under Fijian leadership". The Association was the dominant component of the Alliance Party, formed in 1966, which, representing a coalition of mainly chiefly Fijians and European (with some Indo-Fijian) business interests, assumed the reins of government shortly before independence and subsequently monopolised government for the next 17 years.
15. The settlement agreement was that the union's log of claims be decided on by the arbitrators whose award would be binding for 12 months. Meanwhile the companies were to immediately increase the wages of all employees on \$3/0/6 by 10/6 to \$3/11/0 and to make proportional increases, on a diminishing scale, to the wages of workers receiving more than \$3/0/6 (FT 16.12.59).
16. Police testifying at the Inquiry tried hard to link Anthony with "known criminals" and alleged that the violence on December 9 had been planned, stones having been collected at Nasese that morning (LCP 10 of 1960).
17. Labour Commissioner Pearson in 1954 and 1955 expressly stated that such councils should only be established as temporary institutions in industries where workers were not organised. On April 6, 1959, the FIWC President, Mohammed Ramzan, during the FIWC's annual meeting with the Governor, firmly stated that he "did not want Wages Councils where the workers were organised but only where they were unorganised, such as shop assistants and bus drivers" (See Wages Council Legislation F36/6/3).
18. The report of the Commissioner for Labour 1964 recorded that both the Government Wage Employees' Union and the Transport Workers' Union had been deregistered that year. The former union, which had been formed with the intention of representing all government wage workers except those in the PWD, which had its own union, had been subjected to an inquiry in 1962 following allegations that

it had been accepting non-eligible persons as members. The W&RWGU was deregistered in 1963.

19. In 1963 a Wages Council had been established to cover the Building & Civil Engineering Industry. This was extended in 1965 to also cover the electrical engineering trade (Labour Department Reports, 1963,1965).
20. The Gould Inquiry in fact recommended that there should be a "wages pause" until there were signs of an upward trend in the economy.
21. It is likely that the hotels were advised by the Fiji Employers Consultative Association to withdraw recognition. In December 1967, FECA's Director, Grundy wrote to the Fiji Trade Union Congress (formerly FIWC) General Secretary (Ramzan) enclosing a proposal for special legislation to protect the Tourist industry. The argument for the proposal was based on the fact that "some unions" - not members of the FTUC with whose affiliates the employers enjoyed "cordial and happy" relations - were responding to employers' "reasonable" requests for proof that they did represent workers in a particular industry/enterprise by calling strikes. He suggested that some employers had "good reason to believe that only a minority of his workers were union members" and that the others were being "coerced into joining strikes" (Letter from FECA to FTUC, December 1, 1967; FTUC Files, FTUC Archives).
22. The union was deregistered on the grounds that it had wilfully contravened sections 55 and 57 of the Trades Union Ordinance and had failed to keep accounts in accordance with the Ordinance (Labour Department Report 1968).
23. They included the Fijian Docks Construction Workers Union, the Suva and Lautoka Municipal Council (Fijian) Workers Union, the Fijian Domestic Restaurant & Allied Workers Union, the Fijian Hospital Wages Employees' Union, the Fijian Teachers Association and the Fijian Engineering Workers' Union (Sutherland 1984).
24. In a letter dated June 11 1965 the FIWC Secretary said the FIWC "deplored the government action in giving the breakaway Fijian Government Workers Union partial or any sort of recognition at all" in the face of the strenuous opposition put up by the FIWC (FIWC Files, FTUC Archives).

CHAPTER FIVE

THE POST-COLONIAL STATE AND THE RESURGENCE AND CONTAINMENT OF LABOUR MILITANCY 1970 - 1976

Pick yourself a key industry, insert yourself in the role of a trade union secretary, and in Fiji you're on your way to being a boss of bosses. That may sound a trifle sinister, but in 1972 some antics on the trade union stage did seem touched by a Mafia-like element. A clutch of trade union dons showed that Fiji's parliament is not supreme (Robert Keith-Reid, Fiji Times January 1973)

When I took over the Oilworkers' Union I just went ahead and rocked the boat with the oil companies and in the first year, 1972 - 1973, I got a wage increase of virtually 54 per cent. And I was the envy of affiliates in the FTUC...we were all trying to reach that 52, 54 cents mark. I reached it before Tora and then we were all racing for the dollar mark and then again we were all rushing for the \$1.50 mark and it was a race between Tora's union, Veitata's union and my union (Michael Columbus, Secretary, Fiji Oil & Allied Workers' Union, 1985: interview).

Introduction

When independence came in October 1970, power was handed over to the Alliance Party, which had assumed the reins of government in the Legislative Council elections in 1966. Formed in 1966 with the merging of three ethnic-based political associations, and headed by a high chief, Ratu Kamisese Mara, the Alliance Party represented a coalition of mainly chiefly Fijians and European (and some Indo-Fijian) business interests. Officially espousing a policy of multiracialism, the party was supported mainly by ethnic Fijians, "general electors"¹ and a not insignificant number of Indo-Fijians.²

In the immediate post-colonial period, which this chapter covers, labour grew increasingly militant, especially in the blue-collar unions and particularly in industries dominated or monopolised by foreign capital. By late 1972 and early 1973 industrial

unrest and labour militancy had emerged as a major concern of the post-colonial state. It is significant that two of the most militant of union leaders that emerged in this period were ethnic Fijians, rather than Indo-Fijians, that the membership of their unions was largely, in one case exclusively, Fijian and that they acted without reference to the state-aligned trade union organisation, the Fiji Trades Union Congress (FTUC).

If political independence and the transfer of political power to a predominantly Fijian chiefly elite were seen by Fijian workers and their leaders as the dawn of a new era in which they could count on the state to allow them to push their wage claims, especially against foreign capital, by holding protracted strikes, they were to be sorely disappointed. Their militancy drew from the post-colonial state reactions similar to those exhibited by its predecessor. Its first strategy was to try to contain labour, and this was largely achieved by means of constraining legislation through the Trade Disputes and Counter Inflation Acts of 1973. In the latter part of the decade, which is covered in the following chapter, the post-colonial state's strategy would be to formally coopt labour through the introduction of a national level tripartite machinery for wage setting. Crucial to the effectiveness of both strategies however was the cooperation and collaboration of a sector of the labour movement.

By 1970 a fairly strong labour movement existed in Fiji. In all there were 31 trade unions registered under the Trade Union Ordinance of 1969 and representing some 16,000 workers (Hince 1971:1). An even stronger force existed in the combination of 54 firms under the Fiji Employers' Consultative Association. To some extent the existence of these peak organisations of labour and capital set the stage for their incorporation in later years

into a formalised tripartite arrangement with the post-colonial state. What precipitated that incorporation, however, was the resurgence of labour militancy in the early 1970's and the consolidation of this militancy in the mid-1970's under a new, alternative peak organisation of trade unions. The different implications of this resurgence of militancy for FECA, FTUC and the government led eventually to a shared interest in defeating it. Their responses to events covered in this chapter foreshadowed developments in 1977.

The first signs of militancy in this post-independence period appeared in April 1971, just six months after independence, when a major strike by dockworkers began. Before the year was out a total of 55 strikes had taken place involving an incalculable number of man-days lost - the official tally of 6,987 did not include numbers of man-days lost during the month-long dockworkers' strike because of the difficulty in assessing days lost in casual work. In 1972, the number of strikes totalled 47, and the number of man-days lost, 21,579. In 1973 a total of 69 strikes occurred and the number of man-days lost peaked at 116,998, the highest figure in the country's history.

That the main struggles between labour and capital in the immediate post-independence period were played out in foreign-owned enterprises is not surprising. The post-colonial economy was dominated by foreign companies, with a few key sectors being controlled by state-owned enterprises, and this was indeed reflected in FECA's membership. Half of FECA's members in 1970 comprised wholly-foreign owned enterprises, a further third consisted of local government or para-statal bodies. Only a sixth of its members in 1970 were locally-owned businesses.

The early 1970's, then, was a period of intense militancy within sections of the labour movement. This had two main effects. Firstly it invited the introduction of new legislative and institutional mechanisms for containing militancy. Secondly, it forced to a head a division which had existed for some years between militants and conservatives in the labour movement and resulted in a leading militant forming the Fiji Council of Trade Unions as a rival body to the FTUC. It was principally this latter development, the shifting allegiances that it caused, and the grave threat it thus posed to the very existence of the Fiji Trade Union Congress, that led the FTUC to collaborate more openly with the post-colonial state, first in return for recognition, and later for exclusive participant status in tripartite arrangements.

In this chapter I discuss firstly, the resurgence of militancy and the state's response through an examination of two significant strikes - by dockworkers in 1971, and by airline workers in 1972. These strikes, both led by militant Fijian unionists representing predominantly blue-collar workers, both in industries controlled by foreign capital and both taking place independently of the FTUC, aroused strong reaction. They were described by the press as having 'slid the country towards the edge of a precipice by nearly closing its business life down' (FT 1.1.73). The dockworkers strike was estimated to have cost the country \$400,000 and to have wrought havoc as supplies bound for the country were dumped in neighbouring island ports and a shortage of food and other goods caused an inflation in the prices of consumer goods, requiring the state to intervene with hastily designed price control legislation. The airline workers' strike in the following year resulted in international flights overflying Nadi airport and the consequent loss of thousands of dollars in revenue to the state. The leaders of the unions involved in these

two strikes, together with the leader of the Fiji Oil & Allied Workers Union, formed the core of the militants and the legislative enactments in 1973 were primarily intended to contain their influence.

I also emphasise at the split that occurred in the labour movement late in 1972, resulting in the formation of an alternative, militant peak organisation of labour unions, and show the effect of this on the FTUC. Finally I look at the response of the state to both labour militancy and to the split in the trade union movement, focussing on the enactment of constraining legislation and the resurgence of consultative industrial relations between employers, moderate labour leaders and the state. Militancy by blue-collar workers in foreign-controlled industries, encouraged by changed political circumstances, signified a 'testing' by labour militants of the post-colonial, Fijian state. This militancy challenged the conservative foundations of trade unionism and when the post-colonial state did respond, it was with the tacit support of conservative labour leaders. What was most apparent in the period 1973 - 1976 was an intense struggle for control of the labour movement by contending factions of militants and conservatives. This struggle played directly into the state's hands by leading conservative labour leaders into more open collaboration with it.

Labour Militancy on the Docks: the 1971 Dockworkers' Strike

The first signs of renewed militancy within the labour movement appeared amongst dock labour. The month long strike by the Fiji Dockworkers' and Seamen's Union in April 1971 was the first major strike with which the post-colonial government had to deal. It is not surprising that militancy in the post-colonial period emerged first amongst the

dockworkers who formed an exclusively Fijian occupational group. Fiji's independence settlement had involved the institutionalisation of a political system which ensured the paramountcy of what was defined as 'Fijian interests'. Control of the state was now in the hands of a Fijian chiefly elite although it ruled with the support of commercial interests in Fiji represented by European (and to some extent Indo-Fijian) business elites. The dockers' militancy against foreign shipping companies represented a testing of the Fijian leadership of the post-colonial state and the efforts of Veitata to project the dispute as one between workers and the companies, as well as his concurrence with the idea of approaching the prime minister for a settlement, bear this out.

The history of the dockworkers union and the peculiar conditions under which workers for the docks were recruited were discussed in the previous chapter. The colonial government had not only formed the original unions that merged to form the FO&SU, but had portrayed the leadership of the original Dockworkers Union as exemplary. The union represented workers of five different shipping companies, four of which were foreign firms predominant in the Fiji economy: Carpenters (Fiji) Ltd., Burns Philip (South Seas) Co. Ltd., the CSR Company and the Union Steamship Co. of New Zealand Ltd. The fifth firm, Williams and Goslings Ltd. was a local company owned by local European, Don Aidney, who would become a leading figure in the Fiji Employers' Consultative Association (FECA) in the 1970's. The Fiji Dockworkers' and Seamen's Union, registered in 1965, represented seamen and both permanent registered dockworkers and a large pool of casual dock labourers. In the late sixties Taniela Veitata became the Union's general secretary and under the leadership of 'Big Dan' the union became increasingly militant.

The 1971 dockstrike began on April 8, when dockworkers at Suva refused to work. A week later Lautoka dockworkers had joined the strike. The Union, which had been negotiating with the shipping companies since February 23 on its log of claims submitted in late January, had notified the companies on March 31 that it would not engage in further negotiations and warned that it would 'resort on (sic) other courses of action' within seven days if its demands were not met. The union was seeking a minimum wage of 62.5 cents an hour - a 95 per cent increase for dockworkers who were then receiving 32 cents an hour. The union argued that because of their long term agreement expiring on February 1, dockworkers had not had an increase in four years.

Under provisions of the Trades Disputes (Arbitration, Inquiry and Settlement) Ordinance the Minister for Labour, Ratu Edward Cakobau, appointed a Board of Inquiry which began public hearings on April 13. When an appeal by the companies to the union to continue negotiations, enter into conciliation or resort to arbitration was ignored, the company made public an offer of a 6 cents an hour increase and announced it was willing to negotiate on other claims. The report of the Board of Inquiry, published on April 26, rejected the Union's claim for a 95 per cent wage increase, saying it "knew of no case where a wage increase of this size had been implemented" and that any increase in excess of 8 per cent at the present time, on economic grounds alone, was unjustified (FT 26.4.71). The Board argued for comparability between wages in different industries and said dockworkers should receive comparable treatment with workers in the Municipal Workers Union and the Public Employees Union, both of which had won modest wage increases earlier that year. It endorsed the 6 cents wage increase offer by the employers - which it said represented an 18.7 per cent rise and which exceeded all other offers made

to trade unions that year - as not only the most reasonable but 'the maximum the dockworkers could expect on grounds of comparability'. It added that to ask for more was to 'demand special treatment over and above their fellow workers' (FT 26.4.71).

While both the union and the companies were found to be at fault in the dispute, the Board expressed particular regret at the fact that the Union had not sought the services and advice of the FTUC. Veitata responded with the statement that his union was 'quite capable of standing on its own feet' and that it 'did not need the help of the FTUC', which comments hinted at dissension among labour leaders. Although the board of inquiry commented on the need for prices as well as incomes control, calling for a statement of policy and recommending the establishment of machinery for its implementation, saying it was:

'unrealistic to expect trade unions to exercise restraint in wage claims unless an attempt was made to control prices (FT 26.4.71),

in the dispute at hand, it was the wage recommendations which were highlighted. The Board of Inquiry's endorsement of the 6 cents offer and the argument that relativity to other wage earners in the country was an important consideration strengthened the hand of the shipping companies and encouraged them to continue to resist the union's wage claim. On April 28, at a meeting between the Union executive and the companies, the Union reduced its wage claim to 56.5 cents, but the employers refused to budge from their 6 cents offer.³ The Union refused the employers' offer and stood fast by its claim for a basic wage of 56.5 cents. On May 1, when Union officials offered to return their members to work and take the rest of its wage claim to arbitration if the employers

offered a 50 cent minimum wage, this was rejected by the employers on the grounds that 50 cents minimum wage was still considerably higher than the figure of 38 cents commended by the Board of Inquiry.

The Board of Inquiry, by coming out in favour of the 6 cents offer on the grounds of wages comparability or relativity, provided employers with a convenient and altruistic reason for rejecting the union's claim - the interests of the national economy. It was not a question of what the companies could afford but of what the national economy could sustain. Though the argument was not new and had been used before it was being revalidated and legitimated. At no stage did the companies argue inability to pay. Nor had the Board of Inquiry considered this relevant.

Were it not for the fact that by the end of April new kinds of pressures were being brought to bear on the national economy as a result of the strike, the employers' intransigence might have paid off. But the shipping industry was a vital one, on which depended essential supplies from abroad, including food. By the end of April stocks of many food items and other essential materials were beginning to run short, giving rise to price inflation by some unscrupulous shopkeepers, and necessitating the government's intervention in imposing price control on a limited range of items. On May 1, as the strike entered its fourth week, the Fiji Times reported a 'grave shortage of essential supplies and dislocation of industry' as a result of the paralysis of the ports. The strike had so far cost the country \$400,000. By this time both the union and the companies were engaged in a media campaign to mobilise public support for their respective positions.⁴

The union's case was strengthened by moral support from its New Zealand counterpart. The New Zealand crew of the vessel Waimate refused to sail from Lautoka port in a show of support and their union president, Bill Martin, made an appearance in Fiji and publicly endorsed the Fiji dockworkers' union wage claim. This 'interference' was deeply resented by the Fiji Times, which, as we shall see, took a stance against the dockworkers during the strike. Martin was also reportedly present at a meeting between Veitata, the Minister for Labour and the Prime Minister.

On Monday May 6 the strike ended with the union agreeing to a 10 cents an hour increase, raising the basic wage of dockers to 42 cents an hour. Other items in the union's log of claims were to go to arbitration. The wage increase, which represented a 31.5 per cent increase and was considered a victory for the Union, was decided by the Prime Minister, Ratu Mara, who mediated in the dispute after the two parties failed to reach agreement and decided to appeal to him. In December 1971, Veitata managed to compound his union's success by negotiating an 82 per cent wage increase for Fiji labourers working on Japanese fishing vessels operating from Levuka. This increase brought the wages of experienced seamen to \$72 a month and probationer's wages to \$60 a month and represented almost a 100 per cent increase for non-experienced seamen who were formerly paid \$34 a month. Veitata justified the claim for a large increase on the grounds that the cost of living had risen over the previous two years by almost 100 per cent.

The dockworkers' strike revealed a newfound militancy in the Dockworkers and Seamen's Union, a development that was largely explainable both by the new leadership

of the Union and by changed political circumstances. It also signalled the re-emergence of labour militancy. The demonstrated effectiveness of militancy and the achievement of what was considered a significant wage increase was to set a new pattern for other trade unions which made claims in the following two years. The strategy of taking prolonged strike action to enforce a wage demand marked a departure from the methods and strategies advocated by the FTUC and employed heretofore by organised labour. The FTUC was indeed conspicuous by its absence from negotiations and its silence over the dockers' dispute. Veitata's statement that the Union was "quite capable of standing on (its) own feet" and that it "did not need the help of the FTUC" was implicitly contemptuous of the FTUC. His rejection of the FTUC was reminiscent of the rejection by the Wholesale and Retail Workers' General Union (WRWGU) of the Fiji Industrial Workers Congress (FIWC), during the 1959 strike.

The solidarity extended to the dockworkers by the New Zealand union was a new phenomenon which did not go unnoticed. The Fiji Times, raised questions about the involvement of Bill Martin:

Hopefully Martin's presence and his statements do not mean overseas unions are going to attempt to intervene in industrial matters here (FT 4.5.71).

Six years later "foreign intervention" in support of another dockers' strike, would draw the state and capital (and some trade unionists) out into the streets in the forefront of an orchestrated, and unmistakably anti-labour, 'popular march'.

The Fiji Times' reaction to the 1971 strike was patently anti-labour. The newspaper's unbridled invective against the union ran to a series of editorials which

attacked the militants for continuing the strike; pronounced the wage claim "economically unsound" (FT 5.5.71) and strikes "immoral" and "evil" whose perpetrators should be punished (FT 6.5.71); and, insinuated that the dockers' strike might have been encouraged by "militant, communist-influenced overseas unions" (FT 7.5.71). More significantly, the newspaper raised its voice against what it called a lack of effective machinery for settling industrial disputes, pointing out that provisions for conciliation and arbitration under existing laws depended on voluntary submission by both parties. The dockers' strike, the paper said, had revealed a weakness in the country's administrative structure - this was the inability to handle industrial disputes quickly and to stop union organisers from calling harmful strikes (FT 10.5.71).

What was being called for was some machinery that would outlaw strikes and see its users punished. The Fiji Times, as the leading voice of business interests in the country, would argue this point more forcefully in the following year, after the strike by airport workers.

But if the dockworkers' strike revealed a lack of machinery for quick settlement of disputes, it threw up a new informal avenue - that of direct appeal to the Prime Minister for settlement. The parallels between Mara's special talents in bringing around intractable Indian politicians in 1968 and unyielding dockworkers in 1971 were drawn out by the Fiji Times in an editorial on May 11. Just as he was projected as symbolising or personifying the political goodwill of Fijians towards other races - reified as the official ideology of multiracialism - so his unique role as grand arbiter in serious industrial disputes would come to symbolise the tolerance and goodwill of the post-colonial state towards labour. This would play an important role in Mara's personal orchestration of trade union support for the Tripartite Forum in the latter part of the decade.

Mara's intervention and settlement was seen as a victory by the Union. Later however, it was to prove something of a pyrrhic victory. Even as he announced the settlement in a national broadcast, Mara hinted that the stevedoring industry would be re-organised. His rationale was to break the link between the companies involved in shipping and stevedoring and importing, which resulted in the periodic and unregulated price rises.

Yet what resulted from the Port Commission of Inquiry, set up in 1972, spelt the beginning of the end for the dockworkers' union. The establishment of a para-statal body, the Ports Authority of Fiji (PAF) - to manage, control and operate the Fiji ports and rationalise port operations - resulted in the mechanisation of port operations and the retrenchment of large numbers of dockworkers. Dock labour, in fact, decreased in direct proportion to the level of mechanisation and, ironically, as the PAF, like other para-statal bureaucracies, grew, so did the numbers of its white collar, salaried, support staff (Swamy 1984).

The government reacted in other ways to curb militancy amongst dock labourers. In 1973 it successfully used the Trade Union Ordinance - as its predecessor the colonial state had done before it - to de-register the Fiji Dockworkers' and Seamen's Union. In the intervening months before a new union was registered under a new name, there were also deliberate attempts made by Alliance Party stalwarts to form a rival union for dock labour - a union which would exclude Veitata from leadership. Though this was not successful, it did cause some temporary splits within the ranks of dockers.

If the dockworkers' strike demonstrated labour militancy, it was confined to the dockworkers' union. Its leadership showed no interest in advancing the cause of workers in other industries. It was simply confronting its own group of employers and pressing for wage increases it knew they could afford. The strike by the Airline Workers Union in the following year, by contrast, threw up an alternative national labour leader in the person of Apisai Tora, whose militant background and radical ideology led him not simply to confront the company but also to use the state's existing arbitration machinery to the advantage of workers generally. An articulate hard-liner, a well-known trade unionist and by now a National Federation Party politician, Tora was also now Secretary of the Airline Workers' Union. The result of the arbitration tribunal which sat on this dispute signified a moral as well as a remunerative victory for labour.

The 1972 Airline Workers' Strike

The significance of labour militancy amongst airline workers lay in the fact that it threatened disruption of an important new growth industry - tourism. By 1972 tourism was recognised as Fiji's second main industry. Not surprisingly the industry was dominated by foreign capital; indeed so much of the industry was foreign-owned and controlled that in 1972 it was estimated that only 29 cents in every tourist dollar spent in Fiji remained in the country (Rokotuivuna et. al. 1973; Samy 1980).

Qantas Airways was more than an airline or international carrier of tourists to Fiji. It held direct shares in at least two luxury class hotels, the Mocambo and the Fijian, which enabled it to sell 'package deal' holidays in Fiji from Sydney. More significantly, Qantas provided ground handling services at Nadi Airport from all other international airlines.

This was an extremely lucrative business and the extent of revenue derived was only realised when this operation was wrested from Qantas in 1982 and taken over by Air Terminal Services Ltd., a new local company in which the airport workers union and the government hold equity shares. Prior to 1982 this operation involved the airline in employing large numbers of local labour, skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled, who combined with workers of other airlines to form the Airline Workers Union in 1969.

It was an employment situation similar in many respects to that of the shipping companies and the dockworkers. In both cases the companies were foreign-owned (with the exception of a small shipping company, Williams and Goslings). The services they provided by means of local labour were in critical industries such that any disruption by workers was felt in the wider economy and this placed workers in a powerful position. The profits being made and transferred out of the country were considerable yet the wages paid were poor in proportion to the surpluses appropriated.

In January 1972, when the Airline Workers Union served a log of claims on Qantas, demanding \$1 an hour or \$40 for a 40 hour week and improved working conditions, they were led by Apisai Tora, the Union's secretary. Tora was a key figure in the 1959 strike and in the mid-sixties had also been the protagonist in hotel workers' strikes that had led to mass dismissals and the subsequent burning of hotel units at Korolevu. A known militant and an opposition political figure, Tora emerged in the 1970's as one of the 'big bad men' of the labour movement. When negotiations between Qantas and the Union deadlocked in February and conciliation talks proved futile the Union decided to back its claim with strike action in late March. It also reduced its wage

claim to 50 cents an hour, but Qantas argued this was still excessive and would not compromise. The airline proffered an 8 cents increase instead. The Union had just successfully won a 30 per cent increase for its salaried members employed by Air India ten days after backing its claim with a threat of strike action. With this victory under its belt it was spurred to tackle Qantas.

On May 4 workers at Nadi withdrew labour. A Board of Inquiry into the dispute was immediately set up headed by Mr Justice Johnson, a former District Commissioner. On May 15 it determined that even the 8 cents increase offered by Qantas was too much. Tora rejected the report and the dispute continued until, following mediation by the Minister for Labour, the Union agreed to accept an interim increase of 10 cents an hour and to go to arbitration for the rest. The 10 cents an hour increase brought the basic wage for airline workers to 37 cents an hour.

The Arbitration Tribunal was headed by Mr Justice Hardayal Hardy, a retired Chief Justice from the Delhi High Court, and had two other members, a Qantas nominee, Dr Nit Conn and a union nominee, Mrs Alberta Anthony. The tribunal's composition was significant for the Union had stipulated quite clearly that it wanted someone from a non-European country to head it, and this demand had been conceded. Tora's representations demonstrated characteristic militancy with a touch of theatrics. In a dramatic show of contempt, he tore up the Board of Inquiry Report saying it "got what it deserved". He argued that Qantas was "not indispensable" and could leave if it wanted, and another airline could take its place. He also debunked the standard argument used by commissions of inquiry and tribunals against significant wage increases on the grounds that the country

could not afford it, saying the argument was based on "double standards" and that a selective policy on wages forced "a large section of the population to subsidise an economic elite". Parliamentarians who were already receiving too much had just voted to given themselves a 300 per cent salary increase, he said. The government had made no attempt to control profits and low wages had meant "super profits to overseas-owned enterprises" (Sutherland 1984).

Tora's most significant statements were made by way of a direct appeal to Justice Hardy, as a judge from a third-world nation, to sympathise with the aspirations of Fiji workers:

We felt that non-white people were and are the only ones who would really understand and appreciate the problems confronting non-white workers and their aspirations (Sutherland 1984).

Clearly Tora's argument was that non-white workers in Fiji were being exploited by multinational companies abroad which treated their workers abroad far better.

Justice Hardy's award on September 7 was sympathetic to the lot of Qantas workers. He found the airline had no provision for pension or retirement benefits, nor did it provide life insurance or allow for promotion to a higher scale for workers who had put in several years of service. Workers, he said, had "no sense of security" and lived lives of "perpetual indebtedness" (FT 13/9/72). More significantly, Hardy seemed to have taken the points raised by Tora. He rejected the opinions of previous arbitrators who had refused to make international comparisons when considering Fiji workers' wages. An agreement between Qantas and the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace

Workers provided for a basic wage of \$5.42 an hour for American workers while Workers in Singapore, Malaysia, Manila and Fiji received considerably less. Qantas workers in Honolulu and mainland USA were therefore he said, receiving higher wages at the cost of workers in Fiji. Hardy added that he could see no reason why workers in Fiji should not progressively move to the level of wages in Honolulu.

Hardy awarded a further 8 cents to the airport workers, bringing the basic wage to 50 cents an hour. Although this was, remuneratively, not the most successful award - the oilworkers would three months later achieve a 60 cents wage - the union had scored a moral victory. Their claim for a wage increase based on what their fellow workers were being paid by the same company abroad was validated and legitimated. Tora welcomed the judge's award and heaped praise upon the "wise man from the east", saying his union:

bowed its head to the judge for destroying the argument that all wage increases should be related to the Fiji economy (Sutherland 1984).

Although the Airline Workers' Union victory was not condoned by the FTUC - Ramzan, the FTUC general secretary had in fact gratuitously offered comments which were implicitly critical of the union and supportive of the interests of capital and the state⁵ - Tora encouraged other unions to follow his lead. What Hardy had done, he said, was "open..the door for all Fiji trade unions in their battle to get a decent living wage". Other unions soon began to adopt a militant strategy and use strike action to achieve a 50 cent wage. In the nine-month period between June 1972 and April 1, 1973 (when the government finally imposed a wage freeze), a number of important wage agreements were made involving increases in excess of 40 per cent.

The Oilworkers' Go-Slow

A union which especially profited from using the militant strategy was the Fiji Oil and Allied Workers Union which in fact publicly declared its intention to "top the dockers' wage" and restore itself to its former position as leader in the fight for higher wages. This was a position from which, under the moderate leadership of Titus Philip Rehman, it had recently slipped, but which its newly elected secretary, Michael Columbus (who was also active in the 1959 strike), was determined to regain. An agreement between the Union and the oil companies was due for revision on August 31 1972 and Columbus announced that his union would seek a wage "to support a man, his wife and three children". This, he said, would be higher than the \$18.40 a week that the dockworkers were receiving following a further negotiated 4 cents increase won in 1972. Oilworkers were then receiving 38 cents an hour - 4 cents less than the dockworkers had achieved by striking the year before. For a Union that had seriously challenged the colonial state by striking for better wages in 1959, they had fallen behind and in 1971 were outranked by both airline workers and dockworkers (FT 12.8.72).⁶

The FO&AWU initially sought a minimum wage of \$40 for a 35 hour week, but later reduced its claim to \$40 for a 40 hour work. After negotiations with the oil companies ended in a deadlock in early December, the Union mounted a 'go-slow' on oil deliveries. Further negotiation between the parties and the Minister for Labour began on December 6 and the dispute was resolved with an agreement for a minimum wage of 60 cents an hour for oil workers, to be paid with effect from October 1 of that year. This increase placed oilworkers in the lead in terms of wages, as can be seen from Table 4. They maintained this lead until 1974 when they achieved 85.7 cents an hour and put the

gap between themselves and airline workers at 5.6 cents. From this point onwards an intense competition ensued between the three leading militant unions - oilworkers, dockworkers and airline workers - in what Columbus aptly described as a "race" for higher wages (Columbus 1985: interview).

Table 4: Wage Rates Paid to Unskilled Adult Workers in
Industries Covered by Industrial Agreements, 1972

Industry	Rate per hour (cents)
Oil	60
Dock	46.5
Airline	45.5
Electricity	44
Government	42
Bank	42
Mine	37
Transport	37
Building	36
Sale and Distribution	35
Manufacturing	32
Hotel	32
Timber	31
Municipal	30.25
Telecommunications	30.49
Garage and Engineering	29.32
Pastoral	19

Source: Annual Report, Ministry of Labour, 1972.

Accounting for the oilworkers' successes in obtaining substantial wage increases in this period, Columbus said:

We looked at the ability to pay of the companies and at no time did they plead inability ... We said while the going is good, why not? (Columbus 1985:interview).

Although the oil companies never pleaded inability to pay, oil workers often had to resort to strike action to get what they wanted. According to Columbus, this was because the oil companies were accused of being too willing to give wage increases and so needed justification. In Columbus' words:

You'd be surprised to know that in a lot of instances when I was negotiating with the oil companies I was told quite confidentially by the negotiators from the oil company [sic] side: "Michael, you'll have to go on strike to get what you want. You won't get it otherwise" (Columbus 1985:interview).

Columbus' account, which suggests differing responses by different fractions of foreign capital to union demands in this period, is supported by statements made by FECA. A brief look at FECA's concern, in the context of capital's response to labour militancy, is useful as it suggests reasons for FECA's later willingness to enter a corporatist arrangement with FTUC and the state.

Capital's Reaction to Labour Militancy

The fact that some foreign companies seemed to bow too readily to the demands of militant unions caused some tension among employers and elicited bitter reaction from FECA, which called for solidarity among employers against the increasing power of unions. FECA President, Don Aidney, a "leading spokesman for employers", condemned what he called "gutless firms", which were spoiling things for other longer term or longer established companies by giving in too easily to militant union demands. These firms he said were :

new to Fiji - possibly here for a limited contract and possibly with little expectation of staying here after that contract had been completed.. Often

they do not seek advice, nor do they join industrial associations and sadly, although the things that they do rub off on all of us, usually they do not give a damn (FT 1.8.72).

In his annual report for 1972 the FECA president proposed a strategy for bringing industrial peace to Fiji. The strategy was based on "employers sticking together against militant union demands" (FT 1.8.72). Aidney called on employers to observe the conditions of agreements signed with various trade unions, acknowledge that strikes and walkouts without resort to the agreed channels of negotiation were clear breaches of contract, and refuse to negotiate until the terms of that contract had been restored. The key to success in his strategy was collective employer action against individual unions which broke contracts:

All employers must acknowledge that an illegal strike by a union against one of its members to an agreement is a breach of contract by the union generally and that all parties to an agreement with that union must react jointly. As employers you must stick together and behave as a responsible group (FT 1/8/72).

Aidney advocated a concerted crack down on militant unions by employers acting collectively to enforce the 'legality' of industrial agreements. It was in a sense the employers' answer to sympathy strikes and it demanded employer solidarity. Aidney also alleged that much of the industrial trouble was 'frankly racist' and directed at expatriates:

If anyone disputes this let them look at the targets of our recent strikes (FT 1/8/72).

His view of labour's challenges to capital as 'racialism' was cast in the same mould of thinking that persistently saw workers, not as a class confronting capital, but as one ethnic category confronting another. Although Tora had also spoken of non-white workers, his intent was to show up the discriminatory practices of multinational companies employing labour in a developing state. It was inevitable that labour's demands against capital would be pushed most forcefully against those foreign companies which could afford to pay their workers more and indeed, in other countries, did.

While FECA sought to consolidate its control over capital, the Fiji Times, exhorted the government to hold tripartite talks with labour and capital

in an industrial summit to work out policies which would be of mutual benefit to them as well as to the whole nation (FT 2.8.72).

The Fiji Times went on to suggest that settlement of major disputes be placed

in the hands of the central union and employers organisations, coordinated by the Minister for Labour (FT 2/8/72).

It made mention of the dialogue with Unions and business leaders that the Prime Minister had begun some time ago and said this should be continued and extended by

calling an immediate, major meeting of the top men in both groups to work out some sort of overall policy for the national good. The policy would transcend the existing provisions governing industrial disputes which seem effective only in the short term if at all. Such summit talks would surely be a valuable exercise in helping develop Fiji towards a more prosperous nation in which all can share the fruits of honest work and enterprise and be guaranteed a fair deal (FT 2/8/72).

The significance of the paper's statement was that it was the rhetoric of tripartism five years before it actually materialised. The fact that such ideas were being raised publicly as early as 1972 throws a different light on FTUC claims that it inspired the Tripartite Forum. That the press first articulated these ideas - which were much later translated into actual policy, also raises questions about the paper's connections, not with capital which was always evident, but with the state. In fact the newspaper's editor at this time, Len Usher, was a leading member of the governing Alliance Party.

Polarisation Within the Labour Movement and the Rise of the FCTU

Thirteen years after the 1959 strike then, militancy had made a successful comeback in the labour movement. The mood in 1972 was one of confrontation rather than of compromise. The accommodationist line was being discredited - the FTUC was publicly called a "tame cat" and "lame duck organisation" by Tora - and the strategy of striking was seen as bringing positive and immediate results. It was inevitable that, with this fundamental departure from the methods and strategies espoused and advocated by the FTUC 'old guard', there would be a battle for leadership of the trade union movement and that, if control of the FTUC was not wrested from the conservatives, an alternative radical peak organisation of trade unions would be formed. This is exactly what happened. The years 1972 and 1973 were certainly, as Kumar describes them, "the most difficult years for the FTUC as it found itself on the verge of disintegration". The split that occurred in the union movement late in 1972 was to have significant ramifications for trade union politics in the next five years (1974:24).

The analysis of the split within the FTUC provided by Kumar (1974) focuses on the bid for the presidency of the FTUC by Tora in September 1972. The post became vacant when Sakeasi Waqanivavalagi resigned from it to take up a ministerial appointment in Mara's cabinet. Waqanivavalagi, like Ramzan, the FTUC General Secretary, had stood for the national parliament as an Alliance Party candidate and had won a seat. The political involvements of both Ramzan and Waqanivavalagi publicly confirmed the pro-Alliance, pro-government leanings of the FTUC. Neither leader saw any contradiction in continuing to hold posts in the trade union movement while being government backbenchers. They withdrew from the labour movement only when they were given ministerial appointments.⁷

Tora had indicated that he would contest the position of FTUC president but was barred from doing so by a clause in the FTUC constitution disqualifying office bearers of unions which had not been financial affiliates for at least two years (Kumar 1974:24). Tora then apparently attempted to get the constitution changed to allow him to stand but failed (Kumar 1974:24). The post was filled by none other than Ramzan, who vacated the post of General Secretary (which was taken over by James Raman, Secretary of the National Factory and Commercial Workers Union) to assume the Presidency. This musical chairs manoeuvre seemed engineered to keep the FTUC in the hands of the old guard. Ramzan did not stay very long as president of the FTUC as, early in 1973, he too was offered a Ministerial appointment and so resigned. By the end of 1972 however Tora had withdrawn the Airline Workers Union from the FTUC and was predicting that it would be "only a matter of time before the whole FTUC disintegrates" (FT 6/12/72).

The withdrawal of the AWU from the FTUC could also have been precipitated by the fact that the FTUC had initiated an inquiry into the AWU - an inquiry which, according to Sutherland (1984), was cut short by the Union's withdrawal. The more likely reason for the withdrawal was that the FTUC was firmly under the control of conservatives. In January 1973, Tora was nominated by the Ministry of Labour to attend a three-month trade union course in Britain. As he prepared to go he announced plans to form the Fiji Council of Trade Unions (FCTU), which was established later in 1973, on his return to the country. It is significant that Tora was given the opportunity to go on a training course at this point, particularly as the FTUC leaders who had originally nominated him had spent two futile days trying to get the Minister for Labour to withdraw Tora's name from the list of nominees once he had left FTUC and was publicly disparaging it.⁸ The fact that in the early months of 1973 two repressive laws in the form of the Trade Disputes and Counter Inflation Acts were being hastily prepared suggests there might have been good reason for the Minister for Labour not to heed the FTUC's plaintive requests. Tora had only just returned to the country when the Trade Disputes Bill was announced. His absence and the haste with which the legislation was prepared and enacted do not appear to be entirely coincidental, the more so as the FTUC leaders, who were pursuing their own agenda, were not expected to put up opposition.

In the following years, the FCTU drew away from the FTUC some of the more militant and politically significant unions, both in terms of numbers and in terms of the industries they covered. Many of these were blue-collar unions, amongst them the Municipal Workers Union, the Building Workers Union, the Fiji Electricity Authority Employees Union and the Printing Workers Union. The Airline Workers Union was, of

course, the FCTU's founding member. Although neither the Fiji Dockworkers & Seamen's Union nor the Fiji Oil & Allied Workers Union joined the FCTU, the latter union's position within the FTUC in the early months of 1973 was considered very uncertain.⁹ By 1974, Qantas Salaried Staff Association, Air Pacific Employees' Union and the Sugar and General Workers' Union had joined the FCTU. This gave the FCTU considerable clout. In 1976, according to Kumar, the FCTU was at peak strength. In the following year, however, the FCTU began to lose support and its affiliates defected back to the FTUC after it had entered into an exclusive corporatist relationship with the government and FECA to bolster its power and enhance its legitimacy. It is to the FTUC's private negotiations with the government for exclusive recognition and monopoly control over labour appointments to boards and committees and training opportunities abroad that we now turn, with a view to highlighting the government's successful cooption of the FTUC.

The Introduction of New Controls and the Cooption of the FTUC: the Trades Disputes and Counter Inflation Acts of 1973

By the end of 1972 the inter-linked crises of industrial unrest and inflation had emerged as the main concerns of the post-colonial state. Although rising inflation - which by 1972 had reached a double digit figure - was often blamed on the wage claims and strike action of unions, the value of real wages had in fact been significantly eroded by the higher costs of imported goods and by the inflationary effects of a hurricane in 1972. As such, workers' wage demands in this period represented in large part an effort to restore wages to their previous level. By 1973, however, the post-colonial state was under pressure especially from capital to show strong leadership in managing the economy and

industrial relations. Two laws, enacted in 1973, were clearly intended to curtail unions in their efforts to raise wages through a militant strategy.

The Counter-Inflation Act enabled the government to impose an immediate wage freeze and provided for the establishment of a Prices and Incomes Board to implement an incomes policy. The Trade Disputes Act provided the state with the means of cracking down on labour militancy. The architects of both laws were Vijay R. Singh and John Falvey, both lawyers and ministers in the Alliance government, and Mohammed Ramzan, former FTUC general secretary and president, and by now also a government minister (Columbus 1985:interview).

The Trade Disputes Act was brought in on the heels of a strike by building workers which began in mid-March when the Building Workers Union called all 5000 of its members out on strike to enforce a claim for the 50 cent wage (FT 14/3/73). The same day the strike was called, the Fiji Times, in an editorial, proclaimed it was 'Time Government Did Something'.¹⁰ The following day, March 15, the paper reported a statement by the Minister of Labour that Parliament might hold a special meeting the following month to pass new labour legislation. Mavoa was quoted as saying the government had been thinking of revising legislation for some time to meet modern conditions as most of Fiji's labour laws were ten years or so old. The existing legislation had no provisions for compulsory arbitration or conciliation.

The government's effective cooption of the FTUC on the matter of the two laws was a significant achievement which foreshadowed the later institutionalised cooption of

the FTUC in the Tripartite Forum. That the FTUC's cooption was achieved despite the fact that there had not been prior consultation with the FTUC on the new laws, indicates the desperation with which FTUC leaders sought the state's favour.

The first the unions heard of the Trade Disputes Act was two days before the government's intentions were made public, when the Minister for Labour informed the Labour Advisory Board, on which the FTUC had seven representatives. A draft Trades Disputes Bill was scheduled for discussion by the Board six days later on March 19. The FTUC was apparently taken by surprise by this move and wanted more time for widespread consultation on its proposals. It called an executive meeting for March 18, the day before the Board was scheduled to discuss the bill. On March 16, before the FTUC executive meeting was held, features of the bill were made public with unconcealed delight by the press which had obtained a leaked copy. Under the headline "Government Gets Tough With Unions", the Fiji Times reported that the new legislation would give the Minister of Labour powers to ban strikes and courts the power to go after union leaders for inciting illegal strikes.

The legislation, clearly aimed at taming labour militancy, made it compulsory for 30 days notice to be given for strikes. It also required Ministerial approval before a strike could legally take place. Sympathy strikes and strikes in "essential industries" were outlawed. Essential industries listed under the act included air transport, port and dock services (including stevedoring) and supply and distribution of fuel services. It would therefore contain the three most militant unions. The Minister for Labour furthermore could declare strikes (or lockouts) unlawful in certain circumstances - e.g. when all means

of reaching a settlement through procedures laid down in an agreement were not exhausted, when awards or agreements were still in force but either party had refused to comply with them, when strike action was not in support of a trade dispute within a particular industry or trade or when a strike (or lockout or boycott) was designed to coerce an employer in another industry directly or indirectly. From the first two of these circumstances it is clear that the state was seeking to enforce the legality of agreements between workers and employers by making them binding contracts that it was unlawful to break. Copies of all collective agreements regulating the terms and conditions of employment were to be registered with the Ministry. The second two circumstances underlined the state's concern to curb 'wildcat' or rank and file strikes by workers, independent of the trade union leaders (Rokotuivuna et al. 1973:87). But the most significant new feature which the bill introduced was the power of the Minister to compulsorily refer a dispute to a Tribunal if it involved an essential service, jeopardised the essentials of life or livelihood of the nation as a whole or endangered public safety or the life of the community (Mavoa PR 5.4.73). The decision of the tribunal was to be final and binding on both parties.

The FTUC's new general secretary, James Raman was reportedly upset by the pre-emptive public disclosure and discussion of the bill, before the normal discussions in the Labour Advisory Board had taken place (FT 17.3.73). Although the ministry denied that it had been responsible for the leak and castigated the press for the breach of procedure in publishing the information, such a leak could only have assisted the government's strategy of rushing through, without any real public debate, this repressive law. The leak allowed the government to deflect attention from the bill to the transgression by the press.

Following an FTUC executive meeting on March 18, Raman said workers would put a well-considered view to the Board. At the Labour Advisory Board meeting on March 19, however, Raman and his colleagues reportedly asked the government for more time so the provisions of the bill could be fully studied (Kumar 1974). The FTUC's request was ignored. The bill was scheduled to go before Cabinet on March 21 and thence to Parliament. According to Kumar, its discussion by the Board was 'a mere formality' and the FTUC representatives on the Board were powerless to prevent the bill being rushed through (Kumar 1974). There is however, as we shall soon see, evidence to suggest that behind the closed doors of the Labour Advisory Board and within the even more secluded precincts of private discussion, the FTUC was negotiating a deal with the government.

Meanwhile events were moving quickly. The bill was printed in an Extraordinary Gazette on March 28 and scheduled for tabling in Parliament eight days later, on April 5. The government issued a clear reminder to unions and the public that seven days' notice was necessary before any public meetings could be held. The Airline Workers Union nonetheless went ahead and called a 24-hour lightning strike in protest against the impending law (FT 28/3/73). On March 29, the Prime Minister made a public statement denying that the bill was anti-union or pro-employer and appealed to 'the people' to see the legislation as 'in their best interests'.

Our economy is too vulnerable to be allowed to suffer from industrial strife and I am sure we will have the support of the people of Fiji in doing all we can to resolve this problem (Pacific Review 5.4.73).

On March 31, in a radio broadcast the Minister for Labour, Jonati Mavoa, reiterated this argument that the bill was for the "good of all", neither anti-union nor pro-employer but "pro-Fiji".

Government has already declared its intention to proceed with the Trade Disputes Bill. It is doing so confident that it has overwhelming support from the mass of the people whose best interests the government has at heart. The government believes that this legislation is for the good of the country - that it can make a substantial contribution to peace, progress and prosperity (PR 5.4.73).

Mavoa denied that the government was "getting tough with unions" pointing out that it was in fact the government's declared policy to encourage the growth of 'a strong healthy and responsible trade union movement' (PR 5.4.73). Three days later, the Minister further rationalised that "the Pacific Way is to have a dialogue, not to have a clash" (FT 2/4/73). References to the "good of the country" and to the "Pacific Way" would often be reiterated in the future in the ideological campaign against labour militancy.

The substance of the FTUC's considered view was never made public. But a statement made by the FTUC's new president, lawyer Manikam Pillai, reported in the Fiji Times on March 17, suggests that it might have tried to bargain with the government over the matter of official recognition for the FTUC, a matter which had come to assume importance in the face of the FCTU's establishment and defections from FTUC's ranks to the alternative organisation. Indeed, in early January 1973, an FTUC delegation had met with the Minister for Labour and the Secretary, R.D. Dods, for two days in an effort to extract a commitment from the Minister to exclusively recognising the FTUC. At this

meeting, Raman had told the Minister that the FTUC wanted "declared and not de facto recognition" and said the government should

write to Congress and declare that the TUC [sic] is the sole and only organised body in the country for workers (Minutes of Meeting held at the Ministry of Labour, January 10 & 11, 1973. op cit.).

The FTUC leaders had asked that "opportunities [for trade unionists] ... be channelled through the Congress" to "add to the value of the Congress and be a tangible benefit to persuade unions to affiliate with the TUC [sic]". Specifically the FTUC leaders asked that the FTUC alone be given opportunity to nominate candidates to boards and councils and select candidates for courses. In the words of Manikam Pillai, who assumed the position of FTUC President when Ramzan resigned to take up a Ministerial appointment, the FTUC wanted the government to "deal with the FTUC and no other organisation".¹¹

Now, on the eve of the bill's introduction, Pillai was reported saying that if the government gave the FTUC official recognition, the Congress would be in a position to ensure that as few industrial strikes as possible occurred (FT 17.3.73). He claimed the FTUC had influence among trade unions and adequate disciplining power but this was hardly plausible given the composition of the FCTU, whose militant affiliates included a number of unions controlling crucial industries. As the FTUC saw it, however, official recognition would confer legitimacy on the FTUC and ensure FCTU's exclusion, both of which would undermine and eventually destroy the FCTU.

On April 2, before the bill was tabled in Parliament, the FTUC was invited to meet the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Commerce, Industry and Cooperatives. It

was at this meeting that a concession to the FTUC was made - the holding in abeyance of a clause restraining sympathy strikes. The clause would not be brought into effect until a date notified by the Minister for Labour and not until he had consulted (i.e., advised) the Labour Advisory Board (Kumar 1974:61). The concession was announced as having arisen from the 'helpful and constructive suggestions from the FTUC and others' (Kumar 1974:61). It was also at this meeting that, according to Kumar, the reason for the state's rush to get the Trade Disputes Bill enacted was revealed:

The delegation was told that all prices and pay rates had been frozen with effect from 1st April 1973, as the first phase of a rigid policy aimed at curbing inflation. The freeze was initially to last for 3 months with the possibility of an extension while guidelines for a second phase were prepared and counter-inflation legislation (was) enacted by parliament (Kumar 1971:28).

The Trades Dispute Act was thus the instrument with which the state would contain any strike action by organised labour in response to the impending wage freeze and counter inflation policy. The specially-convened meeting, the concession to the FTUC, and the revelation of the pay and price freeze all suggest that the state was negotiating with the FTUC to accept the Trade Disputes Act. In the light of this, the FTUC-organised public protest rally, held the same day at Albert Park in Suva and the follow-up 24-hour general strike were merely a charade. They were described as such soon after by opposition members of Parliament, Karam Ramrakha and Tora. Indeed Ramrakha further indicted the FTUC leaders following criticism by Raman of the NFP's general silence in parliament on the Act.¹² According to Ramrakha, the National Federation Party had had reliable information that Raman was privately in favour of the bill 'with certain exceptions and

reservations'. He further alleged that at a meeting between the FTUC and NFP parliamentarians, Raman had

made it clear that he did not want any National Federation Party members to carry any brief in Parliament for the FTUC. So instead of asking the only parliamentary source to attack the bill, he was trying to alienate us and minimise our standing (Sutherland 1984:440).

FTUC officials at the time have a different version of what was exchanged at that meeting. They allege that some of the NFP parliamentarians to whom they turned for support on April 2, wanted a commitment from the FTUC of affiliation with their party as a precondition for opposing the bill in Parliament (Kumar 1974).

Whatever the story was, the fact that the FTUC was accorded 'official recognition' in April 1973, amidst the controversy over the Trades Disputes and the Counter Inflation Bills, strongly suggests that a trade-off did take place. Both Tora and Ramrakha attacked the government's announcement of recognition and accused the FTUC publicly of supporting the Trades Disputes Act, of putting up token resistance to justify its existence and of "selling out" the workers of the country (Kumar 1971:). The accusations were not mitigated by the Minister for Labour's denial that the government and the FTUC had worked hand in glove or were linked in any way; or by his explanation that recognition had been conferred because the government felt FTUC represented the majority of trade unions in Fiji. Or indeed by his assurance that other unions and union organisations had the "same right of access to the government" (Kumar 1974).

Regardless of the ambiguity in this "official recognition", the government's action was significant. Formal recognition of the FTUC, which had historically enjoyed a close relationship with the colonial state since its formation (as the FIWC in 1951) meant, as the FTUC leaders knew it would, the complete exclusion of the FCTU from all consultative processes. As Kumar put it:

Recognition established [the] de facto relations during [sic] which the Government had consulted the FTUC on labour matters. It ensured that all workers' representatives on statutory bodies would be FTUC nominees (Kumar 1974).

The fact is that, in practice, the FTUC had always been informally consulted by the post-colonial state, and worker representatives on statutory bodies had always been FTUC nominees. Writing in 1971, Hince noted that:

the Fiji Trades Union Congress is an accepted agency for union-government consultation. In addition to close and continuous informal discussion and communication, Congress representatives sit with employer and government interests in the Labour Advisory Board, the Apprenticeship Council, Manpower Resources Council, the Fiji Provident Fund [sic] and other advisory and executive agencies of government (Hince 1971:387).

Whereas the FTUC had been satisfied with such informal relations in the past and recognition had never been an issue, circumstances had changed with the formation of FCTU. Recognition was seen as critical to FTUC's very survival. There was now a need for the FTUC to be publicly legitimated as this would bear on whether trade unions aligned themselves to the more militant FCTU (which took confrontational action) or to the political unionism of the more conservative (and government-aligned) FTUC. It was

for this reason that the FTUC traded acceptance of the Trades Disputes Act for official recognition.

Columbus confirms that FTUC leaders did negotiate recognition of the FTUC in return for acceptance of the Trade Disputes Act. It was, he says, FTUC's anxiety over FCTU's emergence which made its leaders 'prepared to do just about anything' to get recognition.

..there was panic in the FTUC. They felt that if recognition was not forthcoming Tora would most likely get more unions joining him..because it was a very very critical period...the unions were trying to decide what to do...(Columbus 1985:interview).

What would have attracted other unions to Tora's organisation? According to Columbus:

Tora was militant...and he got what he wanted..and people were inclined to become..you know..everyone was militant..that was a militant period (Columbus 1985:personal interview).

The Persistence of Militancy

The Trades Disputes Act did not immediately have the effect of restraining strikes. Indeed the number of strikes in the year of its enactment escalated to 69 and the number of man days lost through strike activity reached the record figure of 116,998 - a figure which remains unsurpassed. Moreover, Tora, the leading militant, was undaunted by the new law. In August, three months after the law was passed, his union defiantly held a 30-hour sympathy strike to enforce a claim for a superannuation fund from Qantas. The strike resulted in 19 international flights overflying Fiji and a substantial loss of revenue not only to Qantas but also to the state in forfeited landing fees.

The government's response displayed a curious disinclination to use the weapon of the new law. Instead non-union labour was brought in to keep the airport open while the government tough-talked through the press, saying "when it told the union it would not tolerate further stoppages it meant what it said" (PR 16.8.73). Qantas was directed to serve dismissal notices on its 154 striking employees and not to agree to the superannuation fund. And the airline was given the services of the Fiji police force to deliver dismissal notices to the workers at their homes. Tora reacted with outrage, called on the Minister of Labour to resign and challenged the government to prosecute him and the union executive rather than dismiss the workers. Tora's challenge was pertinent. It was significant that the state, rather than use its newly introduced law to crack down on the strike leaders, was resorting to trying to break the strike with scab labour and encouraging the company to fire its employees. The government, having passed its law, did not yet trust the legitimacy of its use.

Tora also accused the government of persecuting FCTU-affiliated unions. Two other strikes then in progress by FTUC-affiliated unions had not been declared unlawful. One of these was by the Sugar and General Workers' Union which was striking for a \$1.00 an hour wage from the Fiji Sugar Corporation, the para-statal company which had taken over milling operations from the CSR. This strike had been called by rank-and-file members of these unions and both its president (Manikam Pillai, who was also then FTUC's president) and secretary (Ram Dayal) denied that the strike was official. Tora also accused the FTUC, which had remained silent and implicitly condoned the government's action in bringing in scab labour, of

toeing the government line and failing miserably in its duties to maintain the freedom of the trade union movement' (PR 23.8.73).

Despite the government's action, the AWU did succeed in this strike. Before the month was out Qantas reinstated all the dismissed workers to their jobs - apparently on the advice of the Australian Labor Government (PR 30.8.73).

The following year, 1974, was no less quiet on the industrial relations front. The number of strikes totalled 83, 21 in the building industry alone which was suffering a serious recession, with many workers being laid off. It was a measure of the effectiveness of the new law that strikes were shorter in duration, reducing the number of man-days lost by almost 50 per cent. In terms of wage gains, 1974 showed the highest ever recorded increases in wages and salaries. The mean hourly wage rate stood at 61.22 cents an hour by the end of that year (PP 28 of 1977) but oilworkers, airline workers, dockworkers and municipal workers were receiving much more than the mean average - 85.7, 80.01, 75.5 and 74.3 cents an hour respectively (PP 1 of 1975:15). The fact that, despite the Counter-Inflation Act and the Trades Dispute Act, trade unions were continuing to strike and continuing to win increases, sometimes in excess of the guideline set by the PIB, stirred employers to raise their voices in protest.

In August 1974, the outgoing president of the FECA, Don Aidney, in his report to FECA members, criticised the government and the unions for the current industrial unrest and said the strike record in the country had worsened since the passage of the new law. He criticised the government for not using the law in instances where it should have, and the Minister for not using the power he had under the Act to declare strikes unlawful. Aidney also complained that employers were often made to accept union demands even if they exceeded the guideline limits, that arbitrators appointed to settle disputes had little

industrial background or experience and that employers were becoming more cautious as arbitration findings were generally 'without appeal and always had repercussions on other industries'. Aidney's statements, which were reported in the Fiji Times on August 2, drew a surprisingly savage response from Labour Minister, Mavoa, who called Aidney's statements 'irresponsible' and curiously defended the right of Fiji workers to higher wages:

For a great many years employers in Fiji have enjoyed the advantage of cheap labour. But they have to realise that our people are more sophisticated today and have contacts with the rest of the world that enable them to compare their conditions with the [sic] of workers doing similar jobs overseas. The picture that emerges does not always convince them that right is always on the employers' side (PR 8.8.74).

Mavoa said employers should take a long hard look at themselves. He said strain did not arise in industrial relations if there was good will on both sides and good will was not always in evidence on the employers' side. While employers expected workers to behave by the code they did not do so themselves, he said, citing the case of the Master Builders Association's refusal to submit to arbitration. Mavoa assured FECA that, but for the Disputes Act, the strike record would be higher still and he challenged Aidney to cite instances wherein the state had pushed employers to accept union claims in excess of the guideline.¹³

This public altercation between the government and employers, indicating a pro-union stance on the part of the government, was clearly indicative of the new drive to win the confidence of the unions. Although, by this time, the government had the FTUC in its pocket, the FCTU was seriously eroding the FTUC's support and therefore its claim to

representing the trade union movement. Posturing a pro-union stance was aimed at both keeping a majority of unions within the fold of the 'responsible' union movement and at winning back defectors to the FCTU. This strategy would be augmented later by its formal cooption of the FTUC into the Tripartite Forum.

In 1975 the number of strikes dropped to 46, with 57,373 mandays lost. In 1976 major strikes in the oil, sugar and mining industries in the early part of the year led the Fiji Times to complain that "the strike syndrome has become endemic" (FT 24.4.76). The conflict between the FTUC and the FCTU intensified in this year and a serious struggle for leadership of the labour movement was in evidence (Howard n.d.). The Trade Union (Recognition) Act passed that year, which made provision for the compulsory recognition of trade unions which could show proof of attaining more than 50 per cent of eligible members was clearly enacted to curb strike activity by obviating the need for 'recognition' strikes, which were frequent. Significantly, Tora's assumption of the leadership of the Fiji Sugar & General Workers' Union and the state's takeover of port operations, both of which events occurred in 1976, meant that two crucial industries, now managed and controlled by the state, were in the hands of militant unionists. During the year, Veitata survived what he later alleged were efforts by "enemies of the union" within the PAF management to break the unity of the FWW&SU (FT 3.6.77) and Tora defied both the Trades Disputes and Sugar Industry Acts.¹⁴ The situation was poised for an unprecedented confrontation between militant unions and the state as employer. This took place in 1977. But first, the state would formally coopt the moderate and pliant union leaders of the FTUC. With their sanction, militant unionists and their organisations could be then dealt with, with impunity.

In the next chapter, we turn to consider the peculiar conditions of 1977 which provided the state with political reasons for establishing a corporatist machinery, the Tripartite Forum; the response that the Forum's institution invoked from the militants and the counter response this drew from the state; and, finally, the contradictions of the tripartite arrangement and the reasons for its eventual abandonment in 1984.

Endnotes

1. This was the official "ethnic" classification given to those of European, Chinese, Polynesian and other descent. It included those classified as "Part-European" and basically covered all who were neither Fijian/Rotuman nor Indian.
2. Independence was attained following intense negotiations between Alliance Party and the predominantly Indo-Fijian Party, the National Federation Party. The independence settlement, represented by the 1970 Constitution, entailed a compromise on NFP's demand for "common roll" (one man one vote). A system of racially-reserved seats (22 each for Fijians and 'Indians' and eight for "general electors"), was combined with a complex electoral system, based on a combination of communal and national (cross-voting) constituencies. This racially-based political system was to encourage ethnic politics in the post-independence period. For a substantive analysis of ethnic politics in Fiji, see Sutherland (1984) and (1992); Robertson & Tamanisau (1988) and Naidu (1988).
3. The companies did however make a package offer which included an agreement to pay attendance money of \$9.12 a week to every dockworker registered with the Labour Utilisation Board who reported for work as required, whether work was available or not. This would have given the 550-odd registered dockworkers a guaranteed 24-hour-week wage, instead of the 48-hour-week wage the union wanted.
4. On May 3 Veitata called on the companies through the Fiji Times to make a 'realistic wage offer' and claimed the union had 'mass support'. It had, he said, received \$2000 from other unions and from the public at large. Veitata also announced that he had nothing against the government and added that the government, by introducing price control indicated it was 'on the union's side'. Veitata also raised the matter of profits being made by the foreign companies involved in the dispute and asked whether this was more disastrous for the economy. The same day the Fiji Times carried a statement, signed by all five companies, and published as a full page advertisement 'for the information of the people of Fiji'. The statement reiterated the concern for the economy: 'Employers are prepared to resume collective bargaining but they are not prepared to voluntarily agree to demands which in their opinion would have the gravest repercussions on the economy' (FT 3.5.71).
5. Ramzan told the Fiji Times that in collective bargaining, "everything boils down to what the economy of a country can afford to pay and provide (FT 14.9.72)
6. Columbus was quoted in 1972 as saying: "Our union set the standard for higher wages after (the) 1959 strike. A wage arbitration awarded a new basic weekly wage of nearly \$10 - which was high for Fiji in those days" (FT 12.8.72).
7. The interplay between trade union and national politics that resulted from the political affiliations of leading unionists of both moderate and militant persuasions assumed greater significance in later years as the period of Alliance rule extended and the party's monopoly of the post-colonial state (and its resources) began to be accepted as permanent.

8. Minutes of Meetings between FTUC and the Minister for Labour, January 10 & 11, 1973, Tripartism File, FTUC Archives.
9. Indeed, FTUC leaders suspected that Columbus, the FO&AWU Secretary, was inclined towards joining the FCTU. Although they had earlier included his and Tora's names on a list of nominees for a trade union training course in the UK, in March the FTUC Executives directed the Secretary for Labour to "withhold [his] name... until further notice (Letter from Raman to Secretary for Labour, 26.3.73 Tripartism File, FTUC Archives)
10. In January the Fiji Times, in an editorial, had challenged the government to take action against union militancy by suggesting that "mafia-like trade union dons" were "ruling the roost" showing that "Fiji's Parliament is not supreme".
11. Minutes of Meeting with the Minister for Labour 10 & 11 January 1973 op.cit.
12. Of the opposition parliamentarians, only Apisai Tora, the trade unionist, substantively criticised and spoke at length on the Trades Disputes Bill. Tora described the Bill as an instrument to aid foreign and local big business by keeping wages depressed. He accused employers of prolonging strikes, citing the case of the building workers union that year when the Master Builders Association refused further negotiations and "tried to starve the workers into submission". Tora said Fiji was completely employer-oriented and that instead of providing machinery to force employers to the conference table and hold them there until a settlement was reached, the government was introducing legislation to shackle and hamstring trade unions. But Tora's most incisive comment on the legislation was that through means of the law "industrial disputes would acquire a marked political character - a dispute [sic] against the government...The government would no longer be able to present a face of paternal impartiality to the workers (PR 19.4.73).
13. The FECA reply to Mavoa rejected the Minister's statement that employers had enjoyed cheap labour arguing that employers had "consistently paid wages comparable with government and had always endeavoured to adhere to government guidelines and development plan objectives" (PR 15.8.74). It claimed wage rates for unskilled workers in Fiji were "higher than almost every other island territory in the South Pacific" and listed a number of strikes and stoppages which could have been declared unlawful by the Minister under the Trade Disputes Act. It also provided evidence of pressure having been used on employers to accept union claims. FECA made similar complaints to the Parliamentary Select Committee on the Counter Inflation Act which was appointed in July 1974.
14. In the first case, he proclaimed that not a cent of the \$500 fine imposed by the court on the General Secretary of the Fiji Municipal Workers' Union (an affiliate of the FCTU), would be paid (FS 17.7.76). The FMWU leader had been prosecuted under the Trades Dispute Act for taking part in an unlawful strike. In the second case, Tora called two strikes in the sugar industry threatening to cripple the industry during the first (FS 21.7.76) and proclaiming, during the second, that "no amount of legislation is going to frighten or cow us into submission" (FS 3.8.76).

CHAPTER SIX

CORPORATIST POLITICS: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE TRIPARTITE FORUM 1977 - 1985

The Tripartite Forum really bugged us...in particular the oilworkers, and I'm prepared to say this quite openly. As far as the Tripartite Forum is concerned, the oilworkers lost more than anybody else. And I think that might also go for the dockworkers but I don't want to speak for the dockworkers. Before we used to get 17 per cent, 20 per cent, 22 per cent increases...

Michael Columbus, Secretary, Fiji Oil & Allied Workers
interview:1985)

Union (Personal

The involvement of the trade union movement in the Tripartite Forum must not be understood as a means of restricting the movement or militancy of trade unions or [as] a substitute for collective bargaining. All these elements are live [sic] and vibrant and the trade union movement is not subservient to commands from any quarter. The Forum is merely a moderating mechanism...

James Raman, FTUC National Secretary, September 1984

Introduction

In December 1975, the 24th Annual Conference of the FTUC adopted a statement on tripartism for submission to the Prime Minister. The statement implicitly promised that "smoother industrial relations", the "elimination of negative and harmful industrial strife" and the achievement of "enhanced productivity" would result from the institution of a tripartite relationship in Fiji.

A working tripartite relationship between government, employers and trade unions will help to minimise the kinds of class conflicts which today plague a number of countries, both developed and developing, and prove gravely injurious to their socio-economic health and national solvency... One of the major results of effective tripartite institutions in our society would be to give our working population a concrete sense of involvement in the economic planning and policy-making processes and of being co-owners and co-beneficiaries of the productive efforts of our nation. (Statement on Tripartism from the 24th Annual Conference, December 1975, FTUC Archives).

The language and ideas in the statement were undoubtedly inspired by Devan Nair, Secretary General of the Singapore National Trade Union Congress, who attended the 24th Conference as chief guest and waxed lyrical about corporatist arrangements involving the SNTUC and the state in Singapore. Couched in the rhetoric of national development, social democracy and consensus decision-making, the appeal to the government for the institution of tripartism gave no hint of the FTUC's real motives. Yet it was precisely these which spurred the organisation's leaders to seek the institution of a corporatist arrangement.

By 1976, not only were close relations between FTUC and the government very apparent, but a general consensus on both the importance of responsible unionism and on tripartism was being publicly articulated. During the FTUC's 25th Annual Conference that year, Prime Minister Mara spoke on the subject of tripartism. His published message to the Conference reiterated the 'Pacific Way' ideology of responsible unionism:

... trade unionism was an alien concept in Fiji, implanted, fostered and assisted by the administering power. And we should not forget this. But as with so much we have inherited in this way, we have made our own adjustments, adapted the system to our multiracial society and ended up with what we like to think is a Fiji style of trade unionism. Where we have succeeded it has been in following our Pacific Way - dialogue, tolerance, goodwill and harmony. Where we have failed it has been where we have followed the Western Way of confrontation and intolerance (FTUC Silver Jubilee Report, 1976).

Mara's denunciation of labour militancy as inappropriate to Pacific culture and society evoked the admonitions of Fijian chiefs to Fijian workers during the 1959 strike. Militancy was 'bad form', it ran against the grain of Fijian upbringing and, most importantly, it reflected manipulation by outsiders. Former FTUC Secretary General, Mohammed Ramzan, now a Minister

in Mara's Cabinet, in his message to the FTUC Conference, foreshadowed the tripartite partnership that was formalised the following year:

Fiji has been ravaged with far too many strikes. Inter-union rivalries is [sic] a cause for concern. All these are damaging the very image which trade unionists have striven to build. Maybe the time has come for the movement to do a lot of soul-searching. As one of the founders I would like to see the movement progress and prosper. Every action must be within the framework of national interest. Self-interest must be subordinated to general national interest (FTUC Silver Jubilee Report, 1986).

Immediately following the 25th Conference, Mara convened a meeting between the leaders of FECA, FTUC and representatives of his government. This meeting is considered by some to have effectively laid the foundation for the Tripartite Forum which was formally established in May the following year.¹ Through the Forum, which formally incorporated the FTUC as the tripartite partner representing labour, the government clearly sought to emasculate militant unions and to generally subordinate the interests of workers to the 'national interest'.

The Tripartite Forum was the crowning achievement in the post-colonial state's strategy of cooption. Not only did it represent the first institutional mechanism for the state's containment of labour, but a section of organised labour was openly complicit in its establishment. More than a consultative or advisory machinery, the Tripartite Forum committed its partners to honour all agreements made. Through the Forum, 'voluntary' wage restraint was achieved through a consensually-determined national wage guideline which the tripartite partners undertook to enforce among their members, and much industrial conflict was defused through the intervention of special committees set up under its auspices. As a result, the early tripartite years - 1977-1981 - were years of moderate wage increases, relatively trouble-free industrial bargaining, greater recourse to institutional means of dispute settlement, and consensus (rather than confrontational)

politics where organised labour was concerned.

By late 1982, however, the tripartite accord was showing signs of strain. The government's failure to persuade its labour partners in the Tripartite Forum that year to agree to a wage freeze to counter the effects of deteriorating terms of trade and of a massive growth in the public sector wage bill (both of which factors caused a fiscal crisis for the post-colonial state (FEDM 1984:viii), soured its relations with the FTUC. By the end of 1984 the honeymoon was over. The unilateral imposition of a wage freeze in November that year implicitly signalled the end of tripartism. Thereafter the relationship between organised labour and the state became highly confrontational. The FTUC's subsequent withdrawal from the Forum in protest at the wage freeze, and its announcement of a national strike, drew threats from the government that it would proclaim an emergency, call out the "disciplined forces", carry out a mass sacking of civil servants and deregister unions (Island Business February 1985:14). An open and bitter conflict raged between the FTUC and the government, one which, two years later, reached a crisis in the electoral victory of an FTUC-sponsored Labour Party (in coalition with the NFP).

What is the explanation for the post-colonial state's creation, and subsequent dismantling, of the Tripartite Forum? What did the corporatist machinery represent? In this chapter I show firstly how political events in 1977 threatened those in control of the post-colonial state and provided the Alliance government with a strong reason to formally co-opt the FTUC. The resultant Tripartite Forum, and the institution of the first annual wage guideline, are portrayed as political mechanisms for both marginalising dissidents and containing labour militancy.

Secondly, I discuss the main contradiction inherent in the Tripartite accord which had begun to surface by the end of the decade. The contradiction was that while tripartism successfully eroded the power and militancy of blue-collar unions, it ironically strengthened the hand of white-collar unions, particularly in the public sector and notably the Fiji Public Service Association (FPSA). The economic (and political) implications this entailed for the post-colonial state provide explanations for the death and burial of the Tripartite Forum in 1984.

I argue that the Tripartite accord was primarily born of political expediency; that it was largely a response to the Alliance government's crisis of legitimacy in 1977. By 1982, the Alliance government was facing the beginnings of an economic crisis and, by 1983, it was being strongly advised by the International Monetary Authority (IMF) to control wages, by a wage freeze if necessary, to 'safeguard (its) fiscal and external payments position' (IMF Staff Report for the 1983 Article IV Consultation;11). With a new mandate to govern, following the 1982 elections, and with the corporatist arrangement no longer working to its advantage, the new Alliance government was now eager to be rid of the Tripartite Forum. Its subsequent deprecation of the Forum as "too narrow an association to represent the national interest" was intended to both discredit and justify marginalising, the FTUC. The National Economic Summit, convened by the government in January 1985 and involving a broad range of interest groups, represented a new legitimising mechanism, one in which organised labour would play a peripheral role. We turn now to firstly consider the political context in which the Forum was born.

The Tripartite Accord and the 1977 Political Crisis

The particular interests that organised capital and a section of organised labour had in eroding labour militancy predisposed them, as we have seen, towards a corporatist relationship with the post-colonial state. FECA, as the peak organisation of capital in Fiji, concerned with protecting its long-term interests, sought to control 'gutless firms', and enforce solidarity among employers. The FTUC, whose credibility and support had been seriously weakened by the militants' successes as well as by the formation of an alternative peak body of labour unions, was bent on regaining legitimacy and power by means of an exclusive and formal relationship with the state. By 1977, the Alliance government of Ratu Mara had its own reasons for formally coopting the FTUC into a corporatist arrangement.

In April that year, a general election had produced a freak electoral victory for the National Federation Party. A racially-based electoral system introduced under Fiji's independence constitution, and the entrenchment of a colonially-inspired doctrine of ethnic Fijian paramountcy, together favoured the retention of political power in the hands of the Alliance Party, dominated by Fijian chiefly and commercial interests. Although the Alliance leaders officially espoused a policy of 'multiracialism', support for the party, especially amongst commoner Fijians, was often mobilised by direct communal appeals and by tacitly invoking the 'bogey' of Indian political domination. The party's electoral defeat in 1977, caused largely by the vote splitting efforts of the more openly conservative but commoner-led Fijian Nationalist Party, as well as by the drift of a not insignificant number of traditional Alliance supporters to the National Federation Party

(NFP),² dealt an unprecedented blow to the party's chiefly rulers. Mara's reappointment as Prime Minister in a caretaker government by fellow high chief and Governor General, Ratu George Cakobau, pending a second election scheduled for September, gave the party an opportunity to try to regain legitimacy before the September elections. The party sought to do this, on the one hand, by establishing a new consensus-based corporatist machinery involving employers and unions, and, on the other, through the punitive use of state power against ethnic Fijian opponents considered responsible for the Alliance's defeat.³

The formal establishment of the Tripartite Forum in May with the voluntary participation of the moderate and Alliance-leaning leaders of the FTUC, and the consensual setting of the first wage guideline, were measures intended in large part to specifically deal both with the Alliance government's 'crisis of legitimacy' and with militant Fijian labour leaders aligned to rival political parties who had challenged the status quo of Alliance rule. Events that immediately followed the establishment of the Tripartite Forum strongly suggest that these were the political motives which underlay the institution of the new corporatist machinery. We firstly look at these events with a view to exposing the state's underlying political agenda.⁴

The First Tripartite Wage Agreement : Reaction and Counter-action

The announced details of the first tripartite agreement, signed in May 1977, conveyed a broad concern with national economic and social development. The Forum was portrayed as the embodiment of a shared concern by employers, responsible union leaders and the government to

strengthen the economy so that there would be more wealth to share (implicitly with workers). The agreement committed the tripartite partners to minimizing unemployment and redundancies; setting wage guidelines as an incentive to new investment; working towards greater security of employment for workers; ensuring industrial peace for the nation; reviewing the income tax system to find ways of alleviating the tax burden; and devising schemes to raise productivity (Kangwai n.d.). Four committees were set up under the Forum to work towards achieving these objectives: the Remuneration Guidelines Committee, the Investment Committee, the Productivity Committee and the Taxation Review Committee. Two further committees were established to facilitate the provisions of the agreement - a Consultative Committee (chaired by the Prime Minister) whose brief was to try to settle industrial conflicts before they erupted and an Advisory Committee to which any party in an industrial dispute could refer and receive advice on items in their log of claims, including the employer's ability to pay. The Consultative Committee, later termed the "Firebrigade Committee" would play "a crucial role in defusing potentially explosive situations in [sic] the Labour/management relations scene" (Raman 1985).

For unions which were not party to it, the most significant aspect of this first Tripartite Agreement was the Agreement on Voluntary Remuneration Guidelines which imposed on all unions a 10 per cent ceiling on wage increases for a 12 month period. The fact that wage agreements made by the Tripartite partners were to be imposed on all trade unions, both within and outside of the FTUC, underlined the value of the corporatist arrangement to the Alliance government in obtaining FTUC consent both for wage restraint, and, implicitly, for what would follow.

Public announcement of the first wage guideline drew expectedly strong reactions from militant unionists both within and outside the FTUC but only two of these, Apisai Tora and Taniela Veitata, openly challenged the guideline and new machinery. Their subsequent repression on the eve of a second national election in September 1977, by an interim Alliance government which had been trounced at the April polls of that year⁵, owed much to the fact that they were both prominent political figures whose campaigns for rival parties were considered to have caused the Alliance's defeat. In addition to being General Secretary of the Fiji Sugar and General Workers Union and leader of the FCTU, Tora was also a prominent NFP politician who had played a significant role for the party during the April elections. As head of the party's "Taukei Committee" he had actively engaged in a campaign to woo ethnic Fijians away from the Alliance and, although the chances of winning ethnic Fijian support on a significant scale for the NFP in this, as in other, elections were poor, Tora's collaboration with the Fijian Nationalist Party (of which Veitata was a prominent member) in an anti-Alliance campaign, undoubtedly contributed to the party's defeat in April (Howard 1991:94,96).⁶

Tora's challenge to the Forum began with a half page newspaper advertisement in which he strongly denounced the "arbitrarily imposed wage increase limitation" arrived at by "the so-called tripartite group" (FT 18.5.77). Evidently unmindful of its purpose, the *Fiji Times* warned that the new machinery would not work without all the sugar unions as well as "the powerful Building Workers' Union", which were in Tora's camp, and advised that, as the government could not simply "wish away" the FCTU, it try to bring Tora to the Conference table and draw him into the Tripartite Forum as a partner. That this was not pursued lends credence to the view

that the Forum was **intended** to exclude and thereby neutralise Tora, while subjecting FCTU affiliates to wage agreements made by the FTUC. This strategy of forcing back FCTU affiliates within the fold of the moderate and state-favoured FTUC, the only organisation through which they could hope to influence the government, was to prove successful.

The FS&GWU was then in the throes of negotiating a wage increase from the Fiji Sugar Corporation, the state-owned company which had bought out the CSR Company's milling operations in Fiji in 1973, and the announcement of the wage ceiling caused a breakdown in negotiations and provoked "an extended stopwork meeting which [Tora added] may be extended indefinitely". While Tora accused the FSC of hiding behind the TPF guideline, insisting that the 10 per cent ceiling was voluntary not mandatory and that the FCTU was neither consulted (about it) nor a signatory to it, FSC's chief executive argued that the FSC, as a member of FECA and as a company in which the state was the major shareholder, was committed to maintaining the 10 per cent limit.

Tora's defiance of both the first wage guideline and of the Sugar Industry Act resulted, surprisingly, in an initial victory for the FS&GWU. On May 22, both parties agreed to a 7 per cent interim pay increase and to settlement by arbitration, in which the arbitrator was not to be bound by the guideline (FT 23.5.77). The union's victory undoubtedly owed something to Tora's public challenge, as FCTU leader, of the government's exclusive accord with the FTUC. Encouraged by the victory, Tora went on to lend support to Taniela Veitata and the dockworkers in their less successful challenge of the wage guideline a month and a half later.

Refusing to be bound by the 10 per cent guideline, Veitata, as industrial advisor to the Fiji Waterside Workers and Seamen's Union (FWW&SU), called a strike on July 5 to back the union's demands for a 30 per cent wage increase, and the sacking of four top executives of the Ports Authority of Fiji (PAF) who were deemed 'enemies of the union'.⁷ Established in 1976 to administer the ports, the PAF was a statutory body, and the FWW&SU was thus locked in dispute with the state as employer, as Tora and the FS&GWU had been a month or so earlier. When efforts to use the new tripartite machinery to help resolve the dispute failed, Prime Minister Mara warned that he would not allow a dockers' strike to close the ports. Veitata counter-warned that he had the full support of the New Zealand Seamen's Union, the Australian Waterside Workers Union and the International Transport Federation (ITF) and that any ship worked in Fiji by strike breakers would be blacklisted throughout the ITF countries (FT 5.7.90). The strike was declared illegal, an arbitrator appointed to settle the dispute, and the dockers ordered to return to work. Veitata, however, refused to comply with the order or to submit to compulsory arbitration.

The Mara government then launched a public campaign against Veitata, the FWW&SU and its overseas supporters. Australian and New Zealand trade unions were warned by Mara that his government would "not tolerate sinister foreign interference in local labour matters" (FT 7.7.77) and the FWW&SU's attempts to involve foreign unions were labelled "a conspiracy against our people" which Mara declared his government would "resist with all the resources in our power" (FT 7.7.77). Governments of other Pacific countries were solicited for support in the fight against what was deemed to be a "conspiracy in the name of regional trade union solidarity"

(FT 13.7.77). After the FWW&SU revised a decision to return to work on July 14, in protest at the arrest and detention of 17 New Zealand crew of the Ngahere (who clashed with police at Lautoka wharf after failing to remove their ship from her berth), the government's anti-union campaign intensified, and was readily supported by the tripartite partners.⁸

Affronted by the NZFOL's and the International Transport Federation (ITF)'s failure to consult the FTUC on the strike, FTUC general secretary, James Raman, sharply criticized foreign unions, particularly the New Zealand Federation of Labour (NZFOL), for interfering in Fiji's affairs (FT 16.7.77). Although the FWW&SU was an FTUC affiliate, Raman condemned the strike, alleging that Veitata had a political agenda.⁹ The strike, he said, was

no longer to further the cause of workers but was aimed at bringing down the government and challenging the law of Fiji. (FT 16.7.77)

These statements of Raman's reflected the FTUC's recently consolidated accord with the government and the allegiance it now showed towards the state. Pledging unqualified support for the government, Raman said "circumstances dictate that we should express our loyalty" (FT 16.7.77). Two days later, Raman justified his siding with the government instead of with the union by portraying the FTUC's position as loyalist and nationalist in the face of "enemies both within and outside Fiji" (FT 18.7.77). That his primary concern was to defend the Tripartite machinery which the FTUC had helped create, and which was indeed crucial to its survival, was made clear in Raman's warning that the FTUC would take 'disciplinary action' against the FWW&SU and 'any other affiliate who damaged the tripartite machine'. The dockers' strike, Raman alleged, was directed at "destroying the [Tripartite] Agreement" (FT16.7.77). Like their labour partners in the new accord, FECA leaders also announced that they were prepared to stand

up and be counted amongst those supporting the government and, implicitly, the nation, and suggested that Fiji find other countries willing to supply it with (imported) goods:

We must not be left in the situation where we can be dictated to by people in New Zealand and Australia. (FT16.7.77)

Only Tora, on behalf of the FCTU, offered support to the dockers' union and expressed surprise at the FTUC leader's statements. To the hue and cry over 'foreign interference', Tora rejoined:

"the illegitimate Alliance Government of the day should realize that trade unions operate on a system of international solidarity". (FT 16.7.77)

On July 19, the day after Veitata called off the strike and agreed to go to arbitration, a massive protest march through the streets, ostensibly organized by a non-political actor, 'housewife' Leibling Marlowe, brought out thousands of Alliance Party supporters in what was both an unmistakably anti-union demonstration and an exercise in publicly legitimating the Alliance leadership. The facts that major business houses closed their offices and stores to allow their staff to join the demonstration against "foreign interference" and that the staff of several government schools brought their students onto the streets to take part in the march were proof of the march's orchestration by the government and its business supporters.¹⁰ The involvement of several FTUC leaders in the march underlined the divisiveness inherent in corporatist politics. The government's monopolization of public media and the power of adverse, anti-union propaganda which dominated the press ¹¹ ensured that a counter-march, organized by the FWW&SU ten days later, drew only a small crowd.

The political campaign against the FWW&SU was escalated by the government's resort to the law. Just days before the arbitration case was due to begin, Veitata and eight other leaders of the FWW&SU were served with charges under the Trades Disputes Act.¹² In protest, Veitata pulled the dockers out on a strike, alleging that the government seemed more interested in prosecuting the union's leaders than in the arbitration.¹³ Veitata's subsequent arrest and detention in custody provoked Tora, two days later, to call the FS&GWU out on a sympathy strike. Tora and seven other officials of the FS&GWU were themselves then arrested and charged with offences under the Sugar Industry Act.

The government's resort to using repressive anti-labour legislation enacted years earlier, but never invoked until now, reflected its determination to crush political opposition before the September elections, while enforcing a climate of public opinion that favoured the new tripartite arrangement and spurned labour militancy. Neither of the trade union leaders received any sympathy from the press. On the contrary, they were both accused by the *Fiji Times* of staging "politically-motivated" strikes (*FT* 5.8.77) and the newspaper became the main vehicle for anti-union and pro-government propaganda.¹⁴ The newspaper was also the means by which orchestrated public outrage over the strike, which culminated in Leibling Marlowe's 'spontaneous' march, was expressed. The deliberate escalation of the FWW&SU dispute through an intensive propaganda campaign against 'enemies' within and outside Fiji, also paved the way for 'justified' use of the law both against Veitata and Tora.

The Alliance government certainly made political capital of the dockworkers' strike. By

casting the FWW&SU in the image of a seditious organization conspiring against the people of Fiji, Mara whipped up a unifying nationalist fervour which provided both justification and a cover for eliminating its two main political rivals. Veitata's public vilification as an anti-nationalist, and his prosecution and incarceration (for six months) for offences under the Trade Disputes Act politically neutralised him, as was intended.¹⁵ The prosecution of Veitata, like that of the FNP leader, Sakeasi Butadroka (who by September had been gaoled for offences under the Public Order Act) was expected to keep the FNP out of the September elections altogether (Naidu 1988: 258).¹⁶ Although Tora was not actually gaoled until after the elections (on October 11 for 12 months) his detention in custody during the elections deterred him from gaining political support.¹⁷

Veitata's goaling was followed by the suspension of FWW&SU's registration for failing to submit annual accounts. This further use of the law against the union, despite the facts that police were still in possession of all its records (having seized them in a raid on the union's offices), and that the trial and subsequent gaoling of union leaders had made it difficult to comply with the law, was evidently punitive.

The prosecution, conviction and imprisonment of leaders of the FWW&SU and the FS&GWU under the Trades Disputes and Sugar Industry Acts represented the severest crackdown by the state on militant unionists in Fiji's labour history. Primarily aimed at subduing and neutralising Veitata and Tora, the crackdown represented both a punitive response to dissident Fijian labour militants considered responsible for the Alliance's electoral defeat in early 1977 and

a determination to contain labour militancy in crucial, state-managed industries which were critical to the interests of the state and its beneficiaries.¹⁸ The threats posed to the chiefly-dominated state by dissident Fijian labour militants aligned to rival political parties and controlling unions in state-run enterprises made it imperative that they be severely dealt with. The severity of the crackdown also suggested a concern to crush commoner Fijian leaders opposed to the status quo of the chiefly-dominated post-colonial state. It was this configuration of interests that lay behind the establishment of the Tripartite Forum, the institution of the Wage Guideline and the state's harsh crackdown on Tora and Veitata. Against the 'national development' rhetoric of tripartism and its emphasis on responsible unionism, and with the FTUC as a partner, the crackdown could be justified as a necessary holding to account of irresponsible, and indeed subversive, unionists who were putting national interests at risk, rather than as political victimization of non-Alliance labour leaders.

The government's more covert repression of labour militancy at the Vatukoula mines the same year, and its apparent sympathy with the mineworkers, provides a useful contrast in containment strategies. Although the Fiji Mineworkers' Union (FMU) also engaged in strike action to try to compel the Emperor Goldmining Company (EGM) to accede to its wage demands, this union did not constitute a direct threat to the Alliance government, as the mining industry was not state-managed and the FMU leader was politically affiliated to the Alliance Party. The strategy of containing labour militancy in the mining industry had to be, and was, both more covert and duplicitous. As we shall see from a brief consideration of the handling of the FMU strike of 1977, the consequences proved ultimately more devastating for

mineworkers.¹⁹

As events turned out, the Alliance government's repressive strategy in 1977 proved effective in bringing to heel Fijian political dissidents in the trade union movement. Both Tora and Veitata later capitulated to the forces of Fijian conservatism and eventually abandoned trade unionism completely. Tora's desertion took place soon after his release from gaol.²⁰ A bitter split between Tora and Dinsukh Lal Morarji, a younger labour militant in charge of the powerful Qantas Salaried Staff Association, whose members controlled ground handling operations at Nadi Airport, resulted in Morarji's defection with several other FCTU affiliates to the FTUC (Howard 1984). The disaffiliation of the FS&GWU in 1979, after Tora lost control of its leadership, put the final nail in the FCTU's coffin (Kumar 1974:39) and it was disbanded shortly afterwards. Having lost his trade union base and with the faction of the NFP which he supported now marginalised politically,²¹ Tora cultivated relations with the Alliance Party whose leadership was more than happy to accept him. He became a Vice President of the Fijian Association, stood as an Alliance candidate in the 1982 elections and was given a ministerial portfolio in the subsequent Alliance government.

Veitata's co-option took a rather different form. His union was firstly offered shares in the Sofrana shipping company and Veitata, as union representative, became a member of the Board of Directors of the company. He further benefitted from Alliance patronage when he was made a member of the PAF Board. The conflict of interests that this engendered effectively neutralised him as a militant. Ten years after their challenge of the post-colonial state in 1977,

Tora and Veitata reappeared as militant ethno-nationalists whose campaign of destabilizing the first non-Alliance government (a Coalition of the FTUC- sponsored Fiji Labour Party and the NFP) provided the pretext for the military coup of 1987.²²

We turn now to look at the tripartite years and particularly at the operation of the wage guidelines and their effects on wage movements in the period 1978 - 1984. I then discuss the growing polarisation within the Tripartite Forum between organised labour and the state and look particularly at the confrontation that was forced to a head between the government and the FPSA in 1984. It was this conflict in the main, between the state as employer and the largest, and by then most powerful and militant, trade union which precipitated the government's dismantling of the Forum.

Contradictions and Effects of the Tripartite Forum

In 1984, the Fiji Employment & Development Mission (FEDM) extolled the virtues of the Tripartite Forum, saying it

must be judged a considerable success in a world where the need for incomes policy is widely acknowledged, but where examples of its successful implementation are few (FEDM Report, 1984:286).

The FEDM noted that despite its remarkable success, the system had "come under severe strain in recent years". It attributed two out of three "threats" to the Forum to employers (which included the state). In the Mission's view, employers threatened the system in two ways. There were those who sought to break the power of trade unions and wanted to impose a legislated

wage freeze; and there were the "new businesses" which were opposed to unionization and evaded wage and industrial safety regulations. The third threat, in the Mission's view, came from Fiji's "deteriorating economic circumstances" which it said made "even modest wage claims...excessive" (FEDM 1984:286).

The FEDM assessment highlighted in a nutshell the main contradiction in the corporatist arrangement which, by 1984, had become all too apparent.²³ This contradiction was that the tripartite machinery had served to strengthen rather than constrain trade unions, especially in their pursuit of wage increases. The setting of national wage guidelines, although aimed at controlling wages, worked in effect to practically guarantee annual wage increases in line with cost of living rises. Unions sought annual wage increases up to the guideline as a matter of right. This did not present a major problem until after 1981 when such increases coincided with a falling national income (FEDM 1984). With deteriorating terms of trade in the early 1980's, annual increases in the government wage bill came to be strongly resisted. A growing tension within the Tripartite Forum, primarily between labour and the state-as-employer, became evident. The artifact of the Alliance government, the Tripartite Forum became the proverbial albatross around its neck and the wage freeze imposed at the end of 1984 represented the state's forcible and unilateral resolution of this contradiction.

The contradiction arose from the corporatist arrangement itself and particularly from the false premise on which it was based, which was that organised labour and the state had a mutual interest in maintaining the Tripartite Forum. Implicit in this assumption was a denial of the

primarily short-term political objectives that lay behind the Forum's institution as far as both the FTUC and the government were concerned. In fact, once these short-term interests were served, the Forum began to be related to by organised labour and the state in fundamentally different ways, reflecting the fundamentally opposed interests of workers and employers. The FTUC began to effectively use its bargaining power within the Forum to advance the interests of organised labour. This meant resisting government appeals to the unions to sacrifice or forgo wage increases in the national interest. The matter of wage restraint became increasingly critical to the state in the 1980's as Fiji entered a recession. Finding itself unable to persuade its labour partners within the Forum, the government became uninterested in consensus politics.

Yet, to be fair to the FTUC, nothing in any of the statements made by the FTUC in its early appeals for the establishment of a tripartite relationship suggested that wage restraint was what it would trade with the government for exclusive participation in a formal tripartite arrangement. Raman later claimed that the agreement to accept voluntary wage restrictions was made following:

"a serious look at statistics by Forum partners which revealed a definite decline in employment levels as well as stagnating investment".

Explaining FTUC's consent to wage restrictions, Raman said:

By mid-April, 1977 it was resolved that voluntary restrictions on pay increases would assist the situation and the workers' side reluctantly agreed to consider this in exchange for undertakings from the employers for maintaining employment at current levels while government was expected to review the system of taxation and provide some relief. (Report of September 9, 1977 to ICFTU/APRO op.cit.).²⁴

Two points are noteworthy in Raman's explanation: firstly, the initial reluctance on the

part of FTUC leaders to agree to wage restrictions suggests that they did not expect this to be their part of the bargain. As such, the FTUC's commitment to wage restraint might have been expected to be partial and qualified - being dependent on its appraisal of the non-remunerative gains to be made by labour in exchange for such restraint. The facts that the primary function of the Forum became one of establishing annual wage guidelines (Howard 1984:7) and that the FTUC engaged in hard-bargaining with its tripartite partners each year before reaching agreement on the guideline, makes the factor of FTUC's commitment to wage restraint a significant one.

Secondly, the state's portrayal as an independent third party, mediating in the capital-labour relation ignores the particular interest of the state as employer in wage restraint.²⁵ Although wage restraint was undoubtably to be in capital's favour since it would minimize the wage demands of a number of leading militant unions controlling industries in the private sector (eg. FO&AWU and the Airline Workers Union), it was also in the interests of the state as employer. Significantly, it was the state, not capital, which in 1977 had a direct and urgent interest in restraining wages especially in industries which it managed and which had come under the control of labour militants. From 1982, it was the state, and not capital, that organised labour found itself at loggerheads with over the matter of wage restraint. We turn now to consider the effects that the guidelines had on wage movements between 1978 and 1982.

The Wage Guidelines 1978 - 1982

The 1978 Tripartite Agreement set a 7 per cent across the board wage ceiling within

which unions were free to negotiate increases. The two-year agreement for 1979/1980 similarly set an across the board wage ceiling of 7 per cent. In 1981 however, out of concern for the growing wage discrepancies that across the board increases were causing, three ceilings were fixed to allow poorer paid workers to negotiate for higher increases.²⁶ The average increase allowed for the year was 10.8 per cent. In addition, the 1981 agreement allowed unions whose workers earned \$1.11 or less an hour to negotiate further increases to bring their wages up to \$1.27 an hour in 1981. This was aimed at "narrowing the gap between unskilled categories of workers" (Agreement on Voluntary Guidelines for 1981). In 1982, a 10 per cent wage ceiling (across the board) was agreed to and unions whose members were earning \$1.27 or less were free to further negotiate increases to take them up to a basic wage of \$1.40 an hour. The 1983 agreement again set several wage ceilings for different categories of workers and made the same special provision for lower-paid unskilled workers.²⁷ The average increase allowed in this year was 5.3 per cent.

From the following table it can be seen that in the seven year period 1977-1983 then, the guidelines set by the Forum's Remuneration Guideline Committee sanctioned a 57.1 per cent wage increase overall. In the same period inflation increased overall by 60.3 per cent. In four of those seven years, the guidelines actually fell slightly below the rate of inflation, as the following table shows. According to the Fiji Employment & Development Mission, the effect of the method of determining the wage guideline - using the previous year's rate of inflation - was that it produced "real wage increases when inflation is falling, and wage reductions when it is rising" (1984:226). Thus, the Mission explained, "when inflation accelerated after 1978, real wages fell,

only to rise again after 1981, with the renewed decline in the rate of inflation" (Ibid). The facts, pointed out by the FEDM, that up until 1981 wage costs did not rise (1984:227) and that real disposable incomes from wages and salaries fell by 4% between 1975 and 1981 (1984:219), suggest that until 1981, the Tripartite Forum was functioning well insofar as the interests of employers (including the state as employer) were concerned.

Remuneration Guidelines and Rate of Inflation 1977-1983

Year	RGC Guidelines(%)	Inflation(%)
1977	10	7.0
1978	7	6.1
1979	7	7.7
1980	7	14.5
1981	10.8	11.2
1982	10	7.0
1983	5.3	6.8
Total	57.1	60.3

Source: Think Fiji First, A Wage Guideline for 1986, Government Publication.

The interests of militant blue-collar unions were not as well served by the Tripartite Forum. Although wage increases up to the maximum allowed by the guideline were easily won by larger, stronger unions, especially those in the public sector and in foreign-owned industries in the private sector (Howard 1984:8), the guidelines operated to restrain what would otherwise almost certainly have been higher wage demands, especially by the latter. Columbus's complaints that the Forum "really bugged" the oilworkers bears this out. Since, according to Columbus, the oil companies in the past had not been averse to granting the FO&AWU the wage increases

it sought for its members, it is very likely that the oilworkers lost more than any other category of workers through the Tripartite Forum. Other militant unions like the FWW&SU, the FS&GWU and the various airline workers' unions were similarly constrained by the guidelines and by the entire tripartite machinery, which induced moderation and non-conflictual industrial relations.²⁸ These unions were also now fettered by the incursions into industry made by the state, which meant that they now had to negotiate directly with the state-as-employer, whose interests as employer ran counter to their own.²⁹ The polarisation within the Forum between organised labour and the state that this engendered, particularly after 1981 when the post-colonial state (as employer) began to strongly resist the demands for wage/salary increases, especially those made by the largest and most powerful public sector union, is what we now turn to consider.

Our focus is on the conflict that emerged between the Fiji Public Service Association (FPSA) and the government. This conflict exposed the major contradiction in the corporatist arrangement and it was primarily to forestall further public sector wage and salary increases demanded by the FPSA that the government imposed a wage freeze late in 1984, thereby effectively disbanding the Tripartite Forum.

The Ascendancy of the FPSA and the State/Labour Conflict of the 1980's

Described in 1984 by Howard (1984:10) as "the most important union in Fiji", FPSA became the major (labour) protagonist in the state/labour conflict that began festering in the early 1980's. The fact that a formerly conservative white collar union of civil servants rose to oppose

the Alliance-controlled state within the Tripartite accord period seems paradoxical. Leckie's history of the FPSA (formed in 1943 by disgruntled European and local civil servants whom the colonial government had not classified within the senior division of the service when implementing the controversial "Barton" report) notes the "striking feature of (its) leadership" in the 1960's - that many of them later assumed senior positions in the civil service or become key figures in the post-colonial government (1986; 1988; 1991).³⁰ As Leckie later makes clear, the striking feature was the extent to which the FPSA, in the decade before independence, coopted members of the emerging Fijian (chiefly) elite which was then being groomed to take over political leadership, knowing they had influence and could easily deal with the colonial government. For most of its early life, FPSA perceived itself as less a trade union than a professional organization (Leckie 1991). The post-independence expansion of the public sector dramatically increased the FPSA's membership (from 3,448 at the end of 1972 to 6,545 in 1979), making it the largest single union in Fiji. Even so, until the mid-1970's, the union was still very passive. So much so, that its application for membership of the FTUC in the early 1970's was at first spurned by leading militants.³¹ The FPSA was accepted into the FTUC in 1973 and the identification with the wider trade union movement that this engendered significantly changed its "essentially moderate, loyal" image and saw it adopt a "far more aggressive approach" (Leckie 1986:30).

In November 1973, in their first ever strike (to enforce a claim for increased wages which the government had indicated it would not pay), FPSA members in the civil service refused to answer calls or process any work for the government (Leckie 1991). The action was successful -

an arbitration court awarded them a salary increase. Almost annually, after 1976, the FPSA successfully backed its wage and salary claims by strike threats. The strategic use of strike threats - no general civil service wide strike ever occurred - to back the "carefully documented and strongly argued submissions" which won the FPSA its cases (Leckie 1991), lent a militant image to a union which had proved itself masterly at negotiating. The FPSA's industrial successes were rewarded with greatly expanded membership, which augmented its financial resources, making it the most affluent of all trade unions in the country. By 1975 it had a full time secretariat and, by the end of 1979, its accumulated funds stood at \$482,727, and it was handling more grievances per year (248 in 1983) than any other union in the country (Howard 1984).

By the early 1980's, the FPSA was playing a key role in both the FTUC and in the Tripartite Forum, and was showing a more militant face. Indeed, it may be said that the FPSA assumed the mantle of militancy earlier worn by blue-collar unions under the leadership of militants such as Tora and Veitata, who had by now been effectively coopted. In 1982, following the dismissal of five staff, FPSA members employed in the National Marketing Authority (NMA) forcibly took over the NMA offices in what was described by the press as "an act of anarchy" (Howard 1984). The FPSA also called a work-to-rule slowdown in the Ports Authority in the same year. In October 1983 and again in July 1984, FPSA strikes by civil aviation workers forced a closure of Fiji's international airport. The growing militancy and power of FPSA exposed the main contradiction in the Tripartite accord and precipitated an unprecedented conflict between organised labour and the post-colonial state.

By 1982, the recession that hit the Fiji economy after a brief boom in 1979 and 1980, was evident in the virtual freeze on hiring in the civil service, the "substantial reduction" in the government's unestablished workforce, and rationalisations in the private sector that entailed the laying off of large numbers of workers (Howard 1991:148). When, in May that year, during the annual tripartite talks to set a wage ceiling for 1983, Prime Minister Mara proposed a wage freeze, FECA, and later the National Federation Party (NFP), supported the proposal, arguing that wage increases, even within the limits of the guideline, had caused discrepancies between urban wage workers and non-waged, rural dwellers and were causing hardship for companies facing financial difficulty (Howard 1991). The simultaneous concern for the incongruent interests of non-waged rural dwellers and struggling companies became the mainspring of official justifications for the wage freeze, when it was later imposed. Although the Fiji Employment and Development Mission later confirmed that wage differentials between organised and non-organised workers had widened dramatically after 1980 (1984:228), it also made the point that far from "appropriating an inordinate share of the benefits of material growth" in earlier years (1984:219), wage earners actually took much of the strain imposed by the economic downturn between 1979 and 1981 (1984:228).³² As such, the arguments of the FPSA's militant General Secretary since 1970, Mahendra Chaudhry, who publicly rejected the 1982 wage freeze proposal, appeared justified.

Chaudhry alleged that workers were being asked to make sacrifices while employers enjoyed uncurtailed profits. More significantly, in what was perhaps the first public expression of trade union disaffection with the corporatist arrangement, Chaudhry called the Tripartite Forum

a "vehicle for restraining the incomes of workers" (Fiji Times 9.5.82). This bitter response from the FPSA leader to the government's proposal highlighted the government's probable purpose in proposing a wage freeze - to forestall the implementation of a Public Service Review Team's Report (the Nicol-Hurst Report), which was to take effect from January 1983, and to avert cost of living adjustments to civil servants salaries for 1983, both of which were estimated to incur a further \$10 to \$20 million in the government wage bill (Howard 1985). In short, the concern was to avoid the consequences of a significantly increased wage and salary bill for the state. By 1983, wages and salaries (personal emoluments) totalled F\$38 million and comprised about 45% of the government's annual expenditure (Howard 1984:10). As the conflict between FPSA and the government over the implementation of the Nicol-Hurst recommendations deepened, the FPSA made the decision, in December 1982, to go on strike.

Meanwhile, a general election in July 1982, which had seen a strong (albeit late) coalition between a resuscitated NFP³³ and a newly-formed, Western-based ethnic Fijian party (the Western United Front-WUF) put up a strong challenge to the Alliance Party, had resulted in an unequivocal electoral victory for the Alliance. Nevertheless, the coalition's eleventh-hour dissemination of an Australian television (**Four Corners**) news programme which exposed the Alliance's commissioning of a secret election strategy paper by Australian political and business consultants made it a close call for the Alliance. Only artful manipulation of the politically-damaging programme for its own ends and a politically unsophisticated electorate saved the party from what might otherwise have been a mortal blow. Now, with 28 seats in hand (out of 52) - two short of the 30 Ratu Mara insisted his party be given or else he would resign (Fiji Times

18.7.82) - the new Alliance government (still under the leadership of Mara) was prepared to show far less tolerance of any opposition and a greater inclination to subjugate, rather than negotiate with, opponents.

In May 1983, the FPSA declared a dispute over the Nicol-Hurst issue. In August, following an agreement to go to arbitration, the government asked civil servants to forgo the COLA agreed to during the June 1982 talks of the Forum, claiming its inability to pay the \$4.5 million involved (Howard 1991:150). Chaudhry refused, saying that the guideline agreed to for 1983 had shown considerable restraint, and adding that a third of the money would return to the government in taxes (Howard 1991:150). According to Howard (1991:149),

Chaudhry had argued for some time that Fiji's relatively high wages had contributed to economic growth and favoured expansionary economic policies on the part of the government.

The FTUC now came out in support of the FPSA, with Raman accusing those advocating a wage freeze (which included FECA) of making workers the "whipping boy" for factors for which they were not responsible (FT 13.9.83).

Contrary to both Chaudhry's and Raman's views, however, external advisors to the Alliance government were arguing forcefully that upward wage movements resulting from tripartite wage agreements were exacerbating Fiji's budgetary and external imbalances, that public sector wages in particular were too high, and that Fiji's wage policy needed to be adjusted to a less favourable world economic environment. The role played by IMF advisors in particular, both in prompting the government to take decisive action to counter pressures from the unions (and

especially the FPSA), and in providing economic justification for doing so, was significant. Indeed, the government's surprise announcement of the wage freeze in November 1984, "without any prior warning" (Howard 1991:152), came a year after it was actually discussed with IMF economic advisors. And, in announcing the wage freeze, the Minister for Finance quoted from an IMF report that stated that Fiji salaries were 15% too high (Howard 1991:152).

The Role of the IMF

In its various confidential reports to the Fiji government since 1977 (when IMF missions first began visiting Fiji), the IMF had consistently argued that Fiji's high wage costs posed a major constraint to its economic development. From 1983, when the agency began to send annual missions, the government's wage policy became the central issue addressed by IMF teams. While acknowledging the contribution that the Tripartite Forum had made to slowing the fast growth in real wages that had characterised the period 1973-76, the 1983 IMF Report held the Tripartite Forum responsible for the "higher than warranted" (by the underlying economic situation) real wage increases since 1977, which were the product of annual wage guidelines that 'persistently compensated' wage earners for rises in import prices (IMF Report 1983:10).³⁴ While discussing the "complex issue" of wage and salary adjustments in the public sector and noting the pressures on the government to meet substantial wage and salary increases for public sector workers (as a consequence of the 6% wage guideline for 1983, a likely further 10% following arbitration on Nicol-Hurst dispute, and an earlier agreement to backdate the award), the report disclosed that if a new understanding could not be reached with the unions on wage restraint, and

pressures remained excessive, the government would consider the imposition of a wage freeze for up to two years in order to safeguard the fiscal and external payments position (IMF Staff Report for the 1983 Article IV Consultation;11).

It added that the Minister of Finance possessed the authority, under the Counter Inflation Act, to issue an order controlling wages throughout the economy for an indefinite period. The IMF team expressed the view that such "decisive action" was necessary, or else cutbacks in public sector employment might "become inevitable to preserve appropriate fiscal discipline". It also advised altering "the institutional arrangements for wage determination so that higher import prices are not reflected in wage increases".³⁵

That the IMF considered public sector wage increases excessive and unwarranted, and the Tripartite Forum's procedures for wage fixation the underlying fault, was made even more explicit in a special paper entitled **Wage Developments in Fiji 1970-1984** that the IMF presented to the Fiji government in October 1984. Arguing that

the protection of real wages through indexation in recent years while incomes in the sugar sector have fallen and industrial costs have risen have contributed to Fiji's budgetary and external imbalances

the report claimed that "since 1977, real wages of central government employees [had] increased substantially faster than the wages of other employees". Government employees, the report said, had not only been "partially protected from the decline in real private sector wages that occurred in 1980-81", but increases awarded to government workers in recent years had accentuated the difficulties of the sugar sector, which had been hit by declining world prices between 1981-84, incurring losses for the state-owned FSC in 1983-84. Outlining the budgetary implications of wage and salary increases for public sector workers, the report went on to say

the growth in wage and salary payments has been a major contributing factor to the deterioration in the Central Government budgetary position in recent years. Wages and salaries increased to 53% of government current expenditure and 44% of government total expenditure in 1984. In terms of GDP, the government wage and salary bill rose from 10% in 1981 to 13% in 1984. The increase in the government wage bill accounts for the bulk of government spending in relation to GDP in these years (p7).

The report estimated that the "exceptional increases" that government employees had been awarded (through the Nicol-Hurst Review) meant an increase of 17% for government employees in the 1982-84 period, compared with an increase of 5% for all employees (pp6-7).

By the time this IMF report was presented to the government (in October 1984), the FPSA had successfully pressured the government to meet backpay obligations for January and February 1984 (which were paid in March) - with the rest to be paid "in installments in cash and government bonds" - and had won its case for COLA (for 1983) which had gone before the Tripartite Forum's own Inability to Pay Committee in August (Howard 1991:151). With the 1984 COLA yet to be implemented, the state was in a critical situation. In the words of Howard (1991:151):

The unions clearly had outmanoeuvred the government. As unionists proved increasingly adept at using the [tripartite] system, the government seemed to be changing its mind about its utility (Howard 1991:151)

Dismantling the Tripartite Forum

The announcement by the Minister for Finance, during his budget speech of November 9, 1984, of an immediate wage freeze which, the Minister claimed, would "save the government \$14 million, reduce the level of imports and contribute to economic recovery" (Howard 1991:152)

signified the ultimate power of the state over labour. The immediate and outraged reaction that it drew from the FTUC leaders signalled the beginning of the end of the state/labour accord as far as the FTUC was concerned. Chaudhry called the freeze "a stab in the back" as it flew in the face of the tripartite accord and contravened the 1984 COLA agreement which had been signed by Prime Minister Mara (Howard 1991:152). Chaudhry accused the government of helping manufacturers "line their pockets" and of "making a complete mockery of the 1984 Tripartite Forum Agreement" (Howard 1991). When informal talks sought by Raman with Mara proved unsuccessful, the FTUC decided to call a series of public meetings to discuss a proposed general strike to protest the wage freeze.

Mara's address to Parliament shortly afterwards, reaffirming support for the Tripartite Forum, while confirming the wage freeze, only angered the FTUC more, since the government had not even discussed the freeze with its labour partners in the Forum. When Raman announced that FTUC would not participate in the Forum while a freeze was in place (Ibid), the government responded by proposing an 'economic summit' for February 1985, to which trade unions would be invited to participate, a proposal which only drew scorn from the FTUC, which decided, in response, to call a national strike (Howard 1991:152). As the FTUC proceeded to hold public meetings around the country to discuss the freeze and plans for a week-long national strike, scheduled to start on February 12, the government reacted. In a news conference, Mara called the proposed strike a threat against his government and said to break the strike he would be ready to proclaim an emergency, "require the help of the disciplined forces (the army and police) and as other options might sack civil servants en masse and, where possible, deregister unions"

(Islands Business, February 1985;14). Then, in an effort to win over public opinion and assume the moral highground, Mara also launched a propaganda campaign with the printing and distribution of a glossy broadsheet aimed at justifying the wage freeze to the public at large. Headed "Think Fiji First" and "Why a Wage Freeze Will Help our Country", and featuring touching photographs of rural workers, the broadsheet proclaimed

In recent weeks, the Government and people of Fiji have witnessed a growing threat to the country from a planned national strike. A group of union leaders have attacked the government's plans to improve Fiji's financial position. They are opposing moves to make more money available for helping the poor, the unemployed and the struggling farmers. They have insulted the Prime Minister, one of the greatest supporters of the unions. In their campaign against the government, they hope to cripple the nation by calling a national strike. After that they want to take over the Government of the country by forming a Labour Party (Think Fiji First n.d.)

By portraying the FTUC as a "selfish minority intent on bolstering its own interests by opposing moves to help the poor, the unemployed and the struggling farmers" (Islands Business, February 1985)", and using the analogy of Fiji as a family (with the government as its head), the propaganda sheet justified the government's use of its "legal powers" to enforce "a plan for improving the family finances" so that "the less fortunate brothers and sisters would have an opportunity to improve their income" (Think Fiji First). The broadsheet discussed, in some detail, Fiji's balance of payments problem and the danger of "becoming bankrupt", arguing that it was better to make adjustments now than to be forced to do so, later, by the IMF.

Although the FTUC's national strike plans were effectively abandoned when two cyclones struck later in January, government's plans for a national economic summit in February went ahead. Two hundred delegates, including trade unions representatives from the FTUC, were

invited to take part. The FTUC announced that it would not attend the summit but would hold its own summit (which it did, in May 1985). The National Economic Summit (NES) served as another legitimating exercise in which the government justified the wage freeze as necessary to ensure that the benefits of development were spread more evenly amongst the people. In a paper entitled **The Wage Freeze: Summary of Government Position**, that portrayed a picture of wage and salary earners doing well while farmers and other, weaker sections of the society suffered, it emphasised the government's responsibilities:

The government knew a freeze would not necessarily be popular in some quarters. But governments must govern. A government cannot abdicate or ignore its responsibilities just because a policy may not be popular. (NES Information Paper, January 1985).

Claiming that it had consulted the FTUC on the wage freeze, but that its arguments had "seemed to fall on deaf ears", the government paper went on:

The government believes in the processes of consultation and dialogue. But in following these principles it does not forfeit the right, indeed the responsibility, to exercise its authority in a way it believes is in the best interests of the nation and particularly the weakest within it.

The Formation of the Fiji Labour Party

Meanwhile, at the first of the FTUC's public meetings, in Lautoka, on December 5 1984, Chaudhry and other FTUC leaders had raised the idea of forming a Labour Party to counter the "ganging up of the government and the opposition against workers" (Howard 1991:154). Although Raman, who had long been an Alliance supporter initially demurred, pressure from within his own union and from other FTUC leaders nudged him towards supporting the idea of

the party's formation (Howard 1991:154). An executive meeting of the FTUC on December 15 unanimously endorsed the proposal and directed the FTUC's Management Board to draw up a party manifesto in time for the FTUC biennial conference in May 1986. Seven months later, on July 6 1985, the Fiji Labour Party was formally launched. In his address to party members, the new party's president, Dr Timoci Bavadra explained the party's formation:

As the economic crisis worsened through the late 1970's and early 1980's, the unions tried their best to work with the government in seeking equitable solutions. The unilateral imposition of the wage freeze last year indicated clearly that the government was no longer willing to discuss matters with the representatives of the working people of Fiji. As responsible trade unionists, we felt compelled to react strongly to government policies that threaten the wellbeing of our members and, in fact, of all Fijians [sic]. We recognised that it was time for the working people of Fiji to form their own political party rather than continue to rely on the goodwill of existing political parties that increasingly had demonstrated that they represented only the narrowest of interests" (cited in Sutherland 1992:175).

The party's formation, and its subsequent victory in Suva City Council elections in November the same year, and unexpectedly good performance in a by-election for a parliamentary seat in December (in which it polled better than the NFP, losing to the Alliance by only 241 votes), sent alarm bells ringing. In June 1986, the government announced that it was withdrawing the 'sole recognition' (as the 'official representative body of the trade unions and organised labour') it had extended to the FTUC in 1973, and advised the FTUC that it would no longer appoint their nominees to boards or committees or consult it on any important industrial issue. Under the tripartite arrangement, the government appointed FTUC and FECA nominees on a range of tripartite boards and councils, including the Labour Advisory Board, seven Wages Councils, the Fiji National Training Council and the Trade Union Advisory Council, as well as the various subcommittees of these bodies (FT 13.6.86). Explaining the decision, the

chief labour officer said:

Government is of the view that ...office-bearers of the Congress have become active participants in an opposing political party and as the boards, councils and committees must be an integral part of and not be in conflict with the policies of the Government, those whose interests are in opposition to Government policy cannot be represented on these bodies (FT 13.6.86).

This final nail in the Tripartite Forum coffin drew an angry reaction from the FTUC whose leaders accused the government of trying to 'punish' FTUC for the formation of the FLP (FT 14.6.86) and frighten unions away from supporting it (FT 22.6.86).

Employers, meanwhile, seemed unperturbed at the raging conflict between the government and the FTUC. FECA's boss, Ken Roberts, dismissed suggestions that the government might also withdraw recognition of FECA, on the grounds that FECA represented only a very small sector of the business community saying this was unlikely as:

We support tripartism and we have seen its result in a satisfactory form of industrial relations... (Fiji Times 13.6.86).

The suggestion in this comment that the FTUC had departed from the spirit of the tripartite accord, resulting in the withdrawal of government recognition, was made plainer in the FECA's boss's next sentence, which revealed acceptance, both of the government's action and of its right so to act:

It is rather sad that the labour leg of this tripartite stool has to be removed at this stage (Ibid;emphasis added).

The amputation of the 'labour leg' of the 'tripartite stool' formally dissolved the tripartite accord and the entire tripartite machinery established in 1977 between the Alliance government, the FTUC and FECA and ushered in a new, and conflict-ridden, era in labour/state relations in

Fiji; an era that began with the election of an FLP (in coalition with the NFP) government in April 1987, and its subsequent overthrow in a military coup, less than a month later.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the Tripartite Forum was a strategic arrangement, primarily born of the (separate) political interests of both a section of organised labour and the post-colonial state. The FTUC's interest in entering an exclusive corporatist arrangement with the government had to do with its need for recognition and legitimacy given the emergence of a rival peak organisation of militant unions. The state's primary motive in instituting the Tripartite machinery was equally political and had to do with eroding the power of militant unionists who threatened the political status quo both by their ability to win large wage demands and by their political appeal (as Fijian union politicians) to an urban, Fijian working class constituency. Recalcitrant Fijian labour leaders aligned to rival political parties presented a political threat to the ruling Alliance Party which had monopolised the post-colonial state since independence, encouraging disaffection among urban workers, and especially among commoner Fijians which undoubtedly translated into support for alternative political parties. The unexpected defeat of the Alliance government in the general elections of April 1977 left no doubt about the political implications of mobilising disgruntled Fijian workers for the chiefly-led Alliance government. The creation of the Forum between the two general elections of 1977 enabled an interim (Alliance) government whose legitimacy was in question to move against key political opponents under the guise of cracking down on subversive labour militants.

Through the new tripartite machinery, the Alliance-controlled state successfully put paid to its political rivals and defeated both blue-collar militancy and the FTUC's challenger, the FCTU. Ironically, however, the Tripartite Forum came to strengthen the Alliance government's moderate trade union partners. It was this contradiction, inherent in the corporatist arrangement, that led to the Alliance government's abandonment of the Tripartite Forum in 1985. The contradiction had first begun to manifest itself towards the end of the 1970's but, by 1984, it was presenting a serious problem for the post-colonial state. Tripartism had particularly strengthened white collar unions representing public sector employees. It was the FPSA in particular which by the early 1980's had come to dominate the Forum and demonstrate increasing militancy in pursuit of their wage demands. The wage demands of the FPSA directly challenged the state as employer and aggravated the economic crisis now facing the post-colonial state. Persuaded by the arguments of the IMF that wages and salaries of Fiji workers were 15% too high, that the tripartite system was working to the particular advantage of public sector workers, and that "government influence [was] necessary to force more realistic thinking about what is possible in the way of national wage increases" given Fiji's stagnant economy (FT 17.4.76), the government began to take steps towards dismantling the tripartite mechanism. The process of dismantling the Tripartite Forum which began with the imposition of the wage freeze in December, was completed with the withdrawal of the state's recognition of FTUC as the official representative of the trade unions and organised labour.

Although in many respects the Tripartite Forum certainly did represent the crowning achievement in the post-colonial state's strategy of cooption, its effectiveness as a co-optive

strategy was extremely short-lived. Certainly it achieved its original purpose in eliminating the problem of militant unionism that posed such a threat to the Alliance government in the 1970's. Only five years later, however, the corporatist arrangement was no longer serving the function of constraining organized labour. Indeed, it appeared to have strengthened the trade unions and to have bred new militants, especially within the formerly moderate FPSA, who now successfully used the tripartite machinery to their advantage. This explains its abandonment and destruction beginning in 1984.

The bitter conflict that ensued between the former labour and state partners in the Tripartite Forum in the process of the state's dismantling of the tripartite system had profound and far-reaching consequences for Fiji. The defeat of the Alliance Party in April 1987 by a coalition headed by the FTUC-sponsored Fiji Labour Party (now in partnership with the NFP), was followed by a military coup less than a month later, which ousted the Labour-NFP Coalition government on the pretext of "protecting Fijian interests". Following a second coup on September 25 1987, Mara and other Alliance leaders were restored to power in an interim government which ruled for five years by decree. The anti-labour policies and practices of the interim regime, which included the introduction of draconian labour decrees stripping workers and trade unions of long-held rights and enabling even greater control by the state, and the open welcoming of such policies by employers, signified the finality of the old tripartite accord between the state, labour and capital. Yet, ethnic-based and political divisions within the labour movement today which are being fostered by the post-coup state, could well see the emergence of a new corporatist arrangement, with a section of organised labour participating.

Endnotes

1. There is some discrepancy in accounts of the Forum's formal establishment. Some FTUC reports refer to the Forum in as having been established effectively with the meeting in December 1976. Another refers to a meeting in January 1977. A Labour Department paper on the Future of the Forum, dated 29 July 1985 says that the Forum was set up in May 1977.
2. According to Naidu (1988::257), the Alliance electoral defeat was caused by the inroads that both the NFP and the FNP made into Alliance-held constituencies. The shift of former Indo-Fijian supporters away from the Alliance, partly in response to the Alliance's rejection of the Street Commission Report in 1976, cost the Alliance some national seats. More significantly, the Alliance lost two crucial seats in the Fijian communal constituencies - one to the FNP and the other to an independent candidate. Support for the FNP, which campaigned for the 'repatriation' of Indo-Fijians to India, mainly derived from growing economic dissatisfaction amongst commoner Fijians, especially in undeveloped provinces. Scapegoating the Indo-Fijian commercial class (and all Indo-Fijians) for Fijian poverty had its roots both in the colonial practice of divide and rule which was predicated on fostering distrust between Fijians and Indo-Fijians, and in the racial ideologies constructed by the colonial state for that purpose.
3. The way in which Mara was reappointed Prime Minister in a caretaker government by fellow high chief and Governor General, Ratu Sir George Cakobau, suggested chiefly collusion. Mara twice rebuffed approaches from NFP leader, Siddiq Koya, to form a Coalition government and then proposed to the Governor General that he be appointed to form a wholly Alliance caretaker government until fresh elections could be held. This was subsequently communicated to NFP leaders in a rival faction to that supporting Koya, with the message that if the NFP did not form a government Mara's proposal would be implemented. Later that afternoon (following two elections within the NFP which finally agreed on Koya's leadership of an NFP government) and just 15 minutes before Koya was scheduled to be sworn in as Prime Minister by the Governor General, Mara was appointed PM by Cakobau. (source?). This "constitutional coup" as it were by the Governor General, acting in his own deliberate judgement, although somewhat justified by the NFP's evident disunity and reticence to assume power,

left Mara's caretaker government in a position of questionable legitimacy.

4. The 1978 Budget speech of the Finance Minister the Forum on grounds that the "national cake" had to be apportioned in an orderly manner lest "an uncontrolled scramble for this limited piece [sic] of cake [lead] inevitably to a reduction in its size with consequent and increased difficulties to all, particularly those least able to look after their sectoral interests" (FEDM 1984;217).
5. The second election returned the Alliance Party to power. In the interim, Fijians were drawn back into bloc-racial voting with warnings of the illustrative threat of Indian domination when Fijians split their vote.
6. According to Howard, Tora was the only Fijian candidate who was not opposed by the Nationalists, and relations between Tora and the FNP during the election were close. Further, Tora's party assisted the FNP by providing financial support and transport for its supporters to the polling booths (1991;96).
7. In a full page story on the "poverty of dockworkers" Veitata, as the FWW&SU industrial advisor, justified the union's demand for a 30 per cent wage increase on the basis of the gross earnings of the PAF. He provided figures on PAF's annual income and demanded that dockworkers be given a larger share of the \$4.20 an hour paid by the shipping companies to the PAF for every productive hour worked by a docker (FT 3.6.77)
8. The seamen, who were striking in sympathy with the FWW&SU, were later prosecuted (FT 14.7.77). Intercessions by the NZFOL and the International Transport Federation to have the seamen released and the charges dropped, together with the picketing of Fiji Visitors Bureau offices in Auckland by members of the NZ Seamen's Union were denounced as "interference" by foreign unions. Later, in a communique to Devan Nair, the President of ICFTU/APRO in Singapore, Raman described the actions taken by the NZFOL as "tantamount to an attempt to hold the judiciary of an independent, democratic developing country to ransom". (Report on Incidents and Events Connected with or Arising from the Recent Industrial Action Involving the members of the FWW&SU September 9, 1977 FTUC Archives).
9. Raman sought in fact to discredit Veitata in his earlier mentioned communique to Devan Nair by describing him as "a prominent member of the newly formed political group[sic], the Fijian Nationalist Party which is advocating the total expulsion from Fiji of some 350,000 who are not of ethnic Fijian origin".

10. This orchestrated march demonstrated clearly that the whole issue of foreign interference was a "lot of nonsense", as alleged by the NZFOL President, Tom Skinner. Skinner said the whole row had been "built up as a political stunt before the General Elections for a new government" (Raman's Report of September 9 1977 to ICFTU/APRO op cit.)
11. Neither Veitata nor Tora received any sympathy from the press. On the contrary, they were both accused by the **Fiji Times** of staging "politically-motivated" strikes (FT 5.8.77) and the newspaper became the main vehicle for anti-union and pro-government propaganda. Letters of support for the government from the Tailevu Provincial Council and, later, from 22 branches of the Fijian Association, a constituent body of the Alliance Party, had been published in the press, giving the impression of wide endorsement of the government's stand. The newspaper was also the means by which orchestrated public outrage over the strike, which culminated in Leibling Marlowe's 'spontaneous' march, was expressed.
12. The Fiji Times had earlier reminded its readers that the state had the power under Fiji's labour laws to prosecute and gaoil or fine those involved in an illegal strike (FT 6.7.77)
13. Although the Deputy Prime Minister, Ratu Penaia Ganilau denied that priority was being given to the prosecution of the unionists at the expense of a quick decision by arbitration on the dockers' pay claim, Veitata's allegation was not unfounded. Proceedings of both the arbitration hearing and the trial against the union leaders were scheduled to run concurrently with the arbitration being held after hours. Veitata had objected, with good reason, to this. The arbitration court was then adjourned to allow the trial to be completed.
14. Letters of support for the government from the Tailevu Provincial Council and, later, from 22 branches of the Fijian Association, a constituent body of the Alliance Party, had been published in the press, giving the impression of wide endorsement of the government's stand.
15. Veitata and seven of the FWW&SU officials were gaoled on August 6 for six months for calling the dock strike.
16. Butadroka was convicted and gaoled before the September elections for making inflammatory racist statements. He contested the elections however, conducting his campaign from prison and, although he did not win a seat, the

party managed to retain 15 per cent of Fijian votes (Naidu 1988:258).

17. Tora was convicted of "hindering the making of sugar". He lodged an unsuccessful appeal to the Fiji Supreme Court in December against his conviction and sentence but in 1978, upon subsequent appeal to the Fiji Court of Appeal, he was acquitted.
18. Para-statal companies like the FSC and the PAF provided the crucial means for the state's own accumulation of capital. As Naidu (1985:14) puts it, these companies are: "the avenue of accumulation for the governing class and an aspirant middle class within the apparatus of the state".
19. The FMU was completely destroyed through the successful cooption of FMU Secretary Navitalai Raqona and union/state acquiescence to Company blackmail in 1977. The company's closure of the mine in February 1977 in direct response to a strike by miners for a \$1.50 wage resulted in the government rallying to the company's aid: EGM was immediately offered financial assistance with a low interest loan of \$2 million and asked to re-open the mine 'in the national interest'. The striking workers, who were paid off by the company, were forced into submission and begged for their jobs back, even at a reduced wage. A special government inquiry committee subsequently asked the miners to take a 5 per cent pay cut - something which they were compelled to accept since their union and the FTUC had already given an undertaking that they would accept the outcome of the inquiry. For this 'resolution' of the miners' strike on the eve of the April elections, Raqona was rewarded with an Alliance ticket. Although he stood in both elections in 1977 he failed to gain a majority. Raqona's co-option by the Alliance leaders eventually cost him his union. When in January 1978 the company began implementing a shock decision, announced in Melbourne in December 1977, to lay off 1000 of its 1300 miners, Raqona called on the government to take over the mine and called his workers out on strike but precipitately ended it when the government announced it would nationalise the mine. The 770 workers who were served with termination notices by the company were asked to accept alternatives that had been arranged for them as an interim measure, pending negotiations on the takeover, which they did. A mass exodus took place as hundreds left the mine. In May, Raqona again unsuccessfully stood on an Alliance ticket in a by-election. The same month the government quietly abandoned the nationalisation plan. A reading of newspaper reports on the abortive

negotiations with the company suggests that the nationalisation announcement may have been a complete hoax which Ragona and the rest of the miners fell for. The union was deregistered later in 1978 for failing to submit proper accounts.

20. Tora's abandonment of the NFP and his participation in the 1982 elections on an Alliance ticket was rewarded with a Cabinet position in the Alliance government following the elections. His radical transition towards conservatism was completed in 1987 when, following the Alliance's electoral defeat, he publicly led a militant ethno-nationalist movement which engaged in orchestrated efforts to undermine the newly elected NFP/Labour Coalition government. Although Veitata did not change his political party affiliation, he too played a leading role in the orchestrated destabilization of the NFP/Labour Coalition government. Thus both turned their organizing skills and militant rhetoric to the services of the chiefly-dominated Alliance state and the destabilization campaign they conducted by mobilizing Fijian peasants and workers through racist propaganda and fear-mongering provided the pretext for military intervention in May 1987. Tora and Veitata were both rewarded with Ministerial positions in the military-installed post-coup Administration which currently rules Fiji.
21. Following the April 1977 elections, and as a consequence of the bitter leadership wrangle which cost the party the chance to govern, the NFP split into two factions - the Flower and Dove factions, named after the election symbols they each used in the subsequent September elections in which they fought each other for seats. The Flower faction emerged the victor and the Dove faction, led by Prime Minister aspirant Siddiq Koya and supported by Tora, became marginalised.
22. Both assumed ministerial positions in the military-installed post-coup (Alliance) Interim Administration in 1988. Veitata's position as Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations in an openly anti-labour government is particularly ironic and underlines his total abandonment of unionism.
23. A further contradiction was that through the effectiveness of its trade union partners, the Tripartite Forum generally encouraged a policy of labour market regulation in favour of workers. By 1984 this was conflicting with the state's tacit encouragement of new industries based

on the exploitation of non-unionized labour. Although in the 2-year agreement for 1979/1980 the Forum partners undertook to give "special consideration to pioneer industries in their infancy and to industries and sectors which have genuine difficulties", in 1981, the Tripartite partners agreed to establish a Wages Council for the Manufacturing sector by September that year and to narrow the gap between unionized and non-unionized workers. They recommended that wages in industries that would be rregulated by this Wages Council be no less than 60% of union wages in comparable industries. In the following three years the government came under increasing pressure from its Tripartite labour partners to regulate wages in other non-organized industries.

24. Raman admitted however that "within the FTUC ranks there were those who were not in favour of any restrictions" but claimed that a "general consensus of opinion" resulted in their acceptance (Report of September 9, 1977 to the ICFTU/APRO op.cit.).
25. This portrayal of the state is implicit in the tripartite exchange of favours Raman describes: the unions exchange wage restraint for employer-guaranteed job security; the state undertakes to review taxation and "provide some relief", presumably to workers although tax relief (ie. tax incentives) to capital is also implicit in the undertaking.
26. The 1981 agreement allowed workers earning wages/salaries of \$3818 or less to negotiate for a 14 per cent increase or \$420, whichever was the lesser; those earning between \$3818 and \$8251 were allowed increases of up to 11 per cent (or \$660, whichever was the lesser) and those earning more than \$8250 were to be allowed a maximum increase of 8 per cent (or \$1200, whichever was the lesser).
27. The ceilings were : 6 per cent for those on salaries/wages of up to \$5000; \$300 on salaries/wages between \$5001 and \$6000; 5 per cent or \$500 (whichever was the lesser) on all wages/salaries above \$6000.
28. The years following the establishment of the Tripartite Forum certainly showed a significant decrease (except for 1979 and 1980) in the number of strikes. From a total of 64 strikes in 1977, the figure had declined to 33 in 1978, and to 41, 44 and 9 in 1981, 1982 and 1983 respectively. With the general reduction of strikes,

there was also a significant decline (except for 1978) in the numbers of workdays lost, with a mere 2,877 workdays lost through strike activity in 1983 compared with 57,373 in 1977 (Sutherland 1992:141). The main reasons for reduced strike activity were that the new tripartite machinery, with its special committees, operated to defuse a lot of industrial conflict and arbitration became a common means of settling disputes. The appointment in 1983 of a Permanent Arbitrator underlined the importance of arbitration in industrial dispute settlement.

29. The state's takeover of the sugar industry and of port operations has already been mentioned. In 1982 the state also took over ground handling operations at Nadi Airport although in this takeover the new company, Air Terminal Services Ltd was uniquely structured to give the Federated Airline Staff Association (FASA), under the militant leadership of Dinsikh Lal Morarji, a one-third share in the company (with the Government and the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji (CAAF) holding an equal share of the remaining shares).
30. Former FPSA leaders cited by Leckie include Ratu George Cakobau (First local Governor General in the post-colonial state), Ratu Mara (Prime Minister from 1970-1987), Jonati Mavoia, Ratu Edward Cakobau and later Charlie Walker (all Ministers in various Alliance governments).
31. Columbus tells of how Tora was opposed to the FPSA joining the FTUC because of the farmer's conservatism and the fear that it might, by its numbers, come to dominate and control the FTUC and make it even more conservative).
32. According to the FEDM, the wages of agricultural workers, after rising to an average of 82% of non-agricultural wages between 1974 and 1980, fell dramatically to 60%, and then 55% by 1982 (1984:228).
33. The split into two factions that followed the April 1977 elections and which had seen the two factions competing for seats in the September elections had left a legacy of bitterness and disunity which NFP's new leader, Jai Ram Reddy, (former leader of the 'Flower faction') sought to contain. Several 'Dove faction' party members were so embittered that they left the party and joined the Alliance (Howard 1991:109).
34. The EEC-funded Fiji Employment and Development Mission's warnings about the problem of basing the wage guideline on the previous year's rate of inflation has already been

mentioned. The FEDM proposed abandoning the formula used for wage indexation in favour of one which would not have the same distorting effects.

35. The IMF staff team's actual advice was that more flexible use of exchange rates and a change in the institutional arrangements for wage determination so that higher import prices were not reflected in wage increases could "bring about the desired shift of income to the export sector and generate a supply response that would strengthen the balance of payments".

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

The thesis began by showing the essential role played by the early colonial state in Fiji in procuring bonded labour for plantation, and later mining and merchant, capital. The coercive nature of labour policies of the early colonial state ranged from the use of law to force workers to fulfil employment contracts to the state's outright suppression of strikes and subversion of efforts by workers to organise themselves.

I argued that although, from 1942, a coercive labour policy was replaced by a policy of formally encouraging responsible, moderate trade unions and promoting collective bargaining between workers and employers, contradictions nevertheless existed between the colonial state's policy and practice. Between 1942 and 1969, the colonial state put in place a number of laws aimed at controlling and limiting the power of trade unions and containing labour militancy. The thesis has argued that the colonial state also employed other mechanisms - institutional and ideological - to continue to contain and control organised labour.

I further argued that the post-colonial state employed very similar mechanisms to control organised labour and contain militancy after independence. The post-colonial state was perceived rather differently by organised labour in the early post-colonial period, which saw the resurgence of militancy mainly amongst ethnic Fijian labour in key, foreign-owned industries and appeals by union leaders to the Fijian political leadership to settle strikes in their favour. Yet, the transfer of power to the Alliance Party, dominated by a chiefly and commercial elite, made little real difference to the state's response to

workers and trade unions. Labour militancy drew from the post-colonial state responses similar to those of its predecessor. In the early years of independence, the post-colonial state set in place legislative and institutional mechanisms to contain militancy primarily among blue-collar, private sector unions controlling foreign industries. By the middle of the first decade of independence, several industries which were under the control of militant unions had become state-owned and militant unions not only challenged the state as employer, but also organised the formation of an alternative and more militant peak organisation to the more moderate state-accepted FTUC.

I argued that the formation in the latter part of the 1970's of the Tripartite Forum - as a corporatist arrangement concerned with national wage-setting, dispute settlement and labour policy formulation - appeared at first as a major achievement in cooption for the post-colonial state. With the consent of moderate trade unions, the new machinery achieved considerable wage restraint and industrial peace. Designed to marginalise and erode the power of militant unionists controlling enterprises which were now state-owned, the tripartite accord was entered into by moderate trade union leaders and the post-colonial state for different, but similarly political, reasons.

The Tripartite Forum was short-lived and I argued that this was because, once their short-term interests in entering the tripartite accord were served, the state and organised labour pursued their fundamentally opposed interests within it and, in the later years of the Forum's existence, organised labour was able to do so with much greater success than the state. The re-emergence of militancy, this time among the state's labour partners in the Forum, constituted a double challenge to the state as employer and to the political

leadership that had forged the Tripartite accord.

The post-colonial state's abandonment of the corporatist arrangement in 1985 with the imposition of a wage freeze, in contravention of a tripartite wage agreement to which the Prime Minister had been signatory, provoked a bitter and open conflict with the labour movement. The response of the labour movement, particularly the formation of the Labour Party, which subsequently won the national election in 1987 in coalition with the National Federation Party, was countered by a resort to extra-legal power, on the part of leaders and supporters of the Alliance Party. Prominent Alliance leaders, among them former labour militants, Apisai Tora and Taniela Veitata, were responsible for the destabilisation campaign which provided the pretext for Col. Sitiveni Rabuka's military coup. Rabuka, who restored Ratu Mara to power in December 1987 as Prime Minister of an interim government, later revealed the names of other leading Alliance figures who, he said, had approached him to do something, following the election of the FLP/NFP Coalition government.

The military coups of May 14 and September 25 1987 which ousted the Labour/NFP Coalition and ultimately restored an (interim) Alliance government, were not only aimed at organised labour but also the FTUC-formed FLP's electoral victory which represented organised labour's gaining control of state power. The undisguised anti-labour policies and practices pursued by the military-installed post-coup administration (in particular, the introduction of repressive labour decrees and the fostering of ethnic Fijian unions) were intended to permanently divide workers and emasculate and control their organisations.

While the post-coup developments do signify the end of Tripartism as it existed from 1977-1985, sharp divisions within the labour movement today could well lead, as they did in the 1970's, to the institutionalisation of a new corporatist arrangement by the authoritarian post-coup Fijian state, with either voluntary or compulsory participation by representatives of organised labour.

It may be concluded then, that Marxist theories which depict the state as generally performing a critical function in capitalist social relations, especially in regards to containing class conflict by controlling and subordinating labour, have been shown to be relevant in the case of both the colonial and post-colonial state in Fiji. The equal importance of the state's ideological and repressive roles in this regard are amply demonstrated in, on the one hand, the consensually-based strategy of cooption and other covert strategies, and in the more openly repressive responses to labour militancy on the other.

The particular interests that those in control of the post-colonial state have in maintaining its legitimacy and their power as a ruling elite or governing class have also emerged as an important factor in this analysis of state/labour relations in Fiji. The ruling elite's own interests are often not acknowledged in the functional-for-capital view of the state. The evidence presented in this thesis would appear to suggest that, in the Fiji case, the institution and dismantling of the Tripartite Forum had as much to do with protecting the interests of the state and of those who control it, as it had to do with advancing the interests of capital.

The idea of corporatism as a strategy of labour subordination generally detrimental to the interests of labour as a whole, is difficult to establish in the Fiji case. Certainly, the Tripartite Forum as a corporatist machinery, was intended to subordinate and dominate labour and in certain respects, in the earlier years of the Forum's existence, it did do this. Yet, it is also undeniable that certain unions, if not labour as a whole, were actually strengthened by the tripartite system and were able to make the corporatist experiment work overwhelmingly in their favour - with the result that it had to be dismantled.

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